VOYAGES

TO THE WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION GAMING

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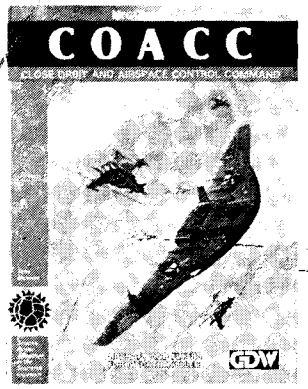
JB KING

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2300AD
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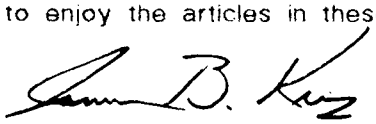
- WELCOME ABOARD -

As promised, "Bird Of Prey Part II" is included in this issue. A quick review of this issue's contents will also reveal that there are two other adventures within these pages other than the one in "Bird Of Prey" - that's three adventures! It's all in our efforts to make **VOYAGES** your primary source of science fiction gaming material. With that same goal in mind, you'll notice that we are now placing a classified advertising section in **VOYAGES** - free of cost. But that's not all. Issue No. 10 will have an increase of four pages!

Beginning with this issue, readers now have the opportunity to quickly and conveniently survey the contents of **VOYAGES**. This issue's survey is on page 30. It may be photocopied or, almost as easy, just list the numbers on a post card and write each article's rating next to the appropriate number. We sincerely hope our readers will take the time to complete the survey, for it is through it that we can best determine what readers want and, almost as important, don't want. Please have them to us by December 15.

Lastly, we are looking for game reviewers to review games and supplements. Though we would prefer to work with reviewers who have some experience, if you feel you can conduct a good review and put it on paper, send us a sample review to look at. We wish we could guarantee to provide review copies, but we receive very few product samples. In the future, after we have grown in circulation, we will undoubtedly be able to provide reviewers with review games.

I'll leave you now to enjoy the articles in these pages.



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2300AD

THE KAFER CONNECTION

PART I: DESCENT INTO TERROR

by Aubrey Forest Melchert

. . . mankind is about to begin what may well be his final descent into terror, for before him a new age is about to break, and a new dawn is rising.

PRELUDE

This campaign begins in the winter of 2298, three weeks before Christmas. Three years ago on the planet Arcturus, a scientific station reported contact with a vessel of a previously unknown alien race. One year ago, all contact with station Arcture was lost. In April of 2298 EST (Earth Standard Time), Kafer forces invaded the Eta Bootis system; the world of Aurore was crushed under the Kafer onslaught. Three months later, in early July of 2298, the Kafer forces were driven back, dispersing their fleet and splintering their remaining ground forces into roving "terror bands".

By December of 2298, little has changed regarding the Kafer conflict on Aurore. The Earth rescue fleet still hovers protectively in orbit around Aurore, in a state of political controversy and confusion as to the next step to take in this crisis, while on the twilight world below, the fight between the Kafer terror bands and the colonists continues.

At this time, the people of Earth have little more than a passing interest in the war with the Kafers. To them, it is a distant conflict on a world bordering the edge of the Frontier; much too distant to warrant real concern. On Earth, the people of man's homeworld struggle with a different kind of invasion as they fight to remember what it really was to be "human" underneath the wave of new technologies that has mundated the streets and markets of her greatest cities. Society is barely able to cope with, let alone explore the ethical and moral implications of such a deluge. In the resulting chaos, society has had no time to respond. For most, simple survival is now the primary concern. But, while society's masses squat helplessly, like sheep before the slaughter, blindly complacent or hopelessly dissolusioned, those who would ride the razor's edge, mankind's quickest and deadliest, are rapidly propelled into power.

It is the winter of 2298, three weeks before Christmas, and mankind is about to begin what may well be his final decent into terror, for before him a new age is about to break, and a new dawn is rising.

DIRECTOR'S SYNOPSIS

The player characters (PCs), for various reasons, have returned to Earth from the Frontier or Tirane (Earth's sister core world). Each, known to the other from past encounters and friendships elects to traverse the Beanstalk to Earth, it's week-long journey allowing them time to catch up with each other (and allow the players to become familiar with each other and their characters). However, the journey to Earth is far from uneventful, as, on the fourth day, disaster strikes. An overload in one of the capsule's capacitors causes a momentary power loss, unleashing a hidden terror upon the unsuspecting passengers from the depths of the cargo hold. And that terror has a name. Kafers.

In this adventure the PCs must fight to survive against a group of Kafers who have mysteriously found their way to Earth, past Gateway Proper's quarantine and onto the

beanstalk. Armed with little or nothing, except their wits and talents this adventure offers the PC's a chance to explore the limits of their resourcefulness against a seemingly unbeatable foe.

THE INSIDE STORY

Unknown to the PC's, a group of Provolutionists, (see **Director's Guide**, sidebar, page 9) by the name of "New Dawn" have plotted to acquire a test group of Kafers for study. Having determined that there might be a possible human analogue to the chemical in Kafers which increases their intelligence during combat, the Kafers were carefully smuggled to Earth to determine if research would bear this hypothesis out.

The driving force behind this plot is a man by the name of Jean-Claude Cartier (see NPC File). A member of the French Biological Weapons Research Division (BWRD), Cartier posed as an official of the L'Institut des Etudes Xenologiques (IEX) to bypass Gateway Proper's quarantine and transfer his cargo onto the beanstalk capsule. Fearful that something might go wrong without his supervision, Cartier boarded the capsule to oversee the last stage of the transfer.

TROUBLE ON THE BEANSTALK

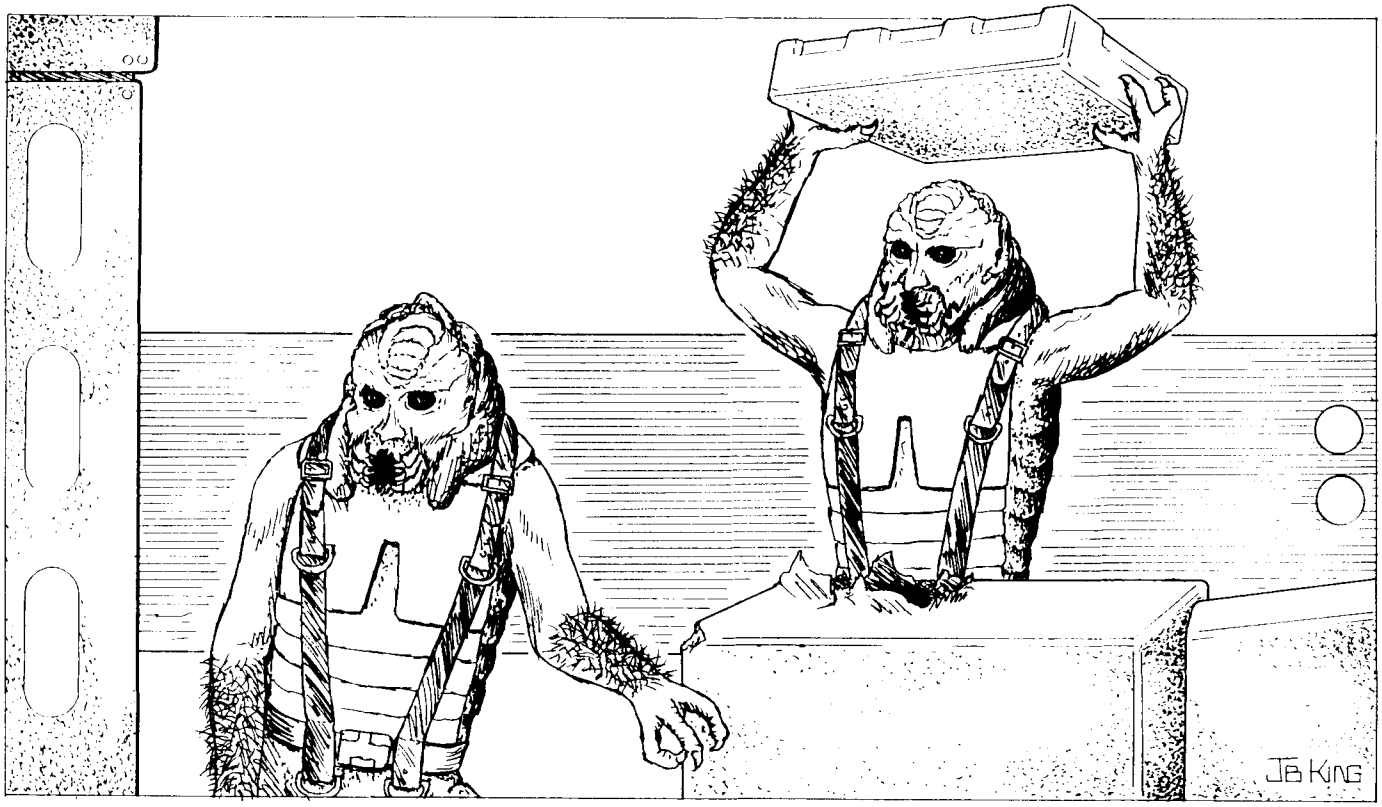
The beanstalk capsule is essentially a very large and very luxurious elevator to and from the stars. Because the journey consumes five days in transit, it is considered more of a vacation cruise than a means of fast transit. Far more economical and safer than the faster and more expensive interface vehicles, it is also a popular means of hauling cargo from Earth to Gateway.

For the PC's, the journey will be one of relaxing comfort. Perhaps the only great inconvenience is that gravity onboard the beanstalk is nonexistant and, as a result, velcro over-socks must be worn if transit through the capsule is desired (in addition to the other standard inconveniences of zero-G transit).

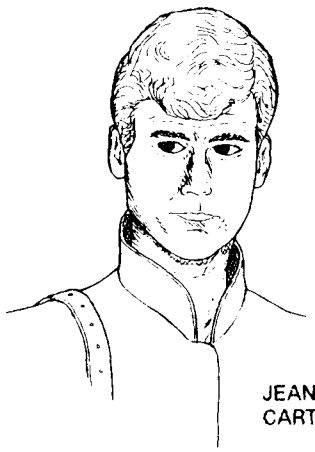
The beanstalk is occupied by fourteen other passengers in addition to the PC's, and the capsule has a crew of eight. Among the passengers onboard is Jean-Claude Cartier and Tai Sunn. Both Cartier and Sunn remain seperate from one another and inconspicuous until the Kafers escape.

The cause of the Kafer escape is an overload in one of the capsule's capacitors, which results in a momentary power failure. Ordinarily, this would be of no concern. However, below in the cargo holding bay, the Kafers are held in cryogenic freeze. When the power fails, the cryo-unit's own computer and generator kick in, and it automatically revives the Kafers, as is standard practice when used on humans. The Kafers, thus revived and in a foreign, dangerous environment, quickly awaken to full intelligence and seek out their captors above.

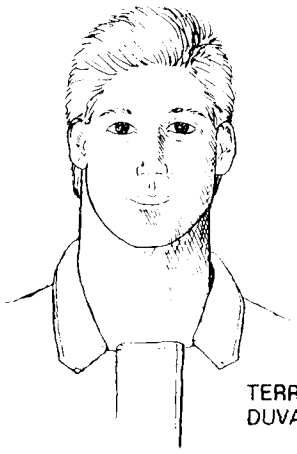
To the detriment of the PC's and to Cartier's plan as well, Cartier also brought several Kafer weapons aboard for additional study. The Kafers, now freed, go berserk, and trash everything in sight until by chance they come upon their weapons. The resulting noise and muffled explosions



THE KAFER CONNECTION NPC FILE



JEAN-CLAUDE CARTIER



TERRENCE DUVAL



TAI SUNN

JB KING

JEAN-CLAUDE CARTIER

Body Type: Normal Age:46 Career:BWRD Director New Dawn Terrorist

Primary Skills: Intellectual-5 Secondary: General-4

Physical Attributes: 2 Mental Attributes: 4

NPC Motivation Results: Heart 7, Spade 9

Notes: Cartier is one of, if not the most politically powerful member of the "New Dawn". Originally a member of the BWRD, Cartier was cross-assigned to the IEX to gain any pertinent data which they may have uncovered concerning the Kafers on Aurore. It was during this time that Cartier was introduced to T'lara Sunn and later recruited into the New Dawn. Still bearing his titles, both as an official director within the IEX as well as his position within the BWRD, Cartier has become nearly untouchable, bearing full support from the BWRD and the IEX, as well as the resources of the New Dawn. (As a side note, it should be stressed that the IEX is fully unaware of Cartier's affiliation with the BWRD and would expell him if such information became available.)

When Cartier gained information concerning the Kafer intelligence process and learned of the possibility that a human analogue, acting as a hybred of adrenaline for the mind, could be created to simulate the same effect, conceived a plan to smuggle some captured Kafers from Aurore through the frontier and to Earth for study by the New Dawn. Once the Kafers were offloaded from the beanstalk capsule, Cartier's master plan would be launched: initially, the Kafers would be transported from Libreville (see Earth/Cybertech Sourcebook p. 66) to a secret BWRD base in Cairo, all the while passing through security and quarantine procedures on his IEX or BWRD credentials. Once the Kafers were safely at the hidden Cairo base, he would order them transferred again, only this time he would arrange an accident in which the Kafers were "destroyed". Thus removed from observation, the Kafers would be secretly transported to a hidden New Dawn laboratory, where study of their unique endocrenology could begin.

To other men, a task such as this would be daunting. But Cartier is possessed with unusually high determination (Determination Attribute of 19); this coupled with his enormous sense of ambition makes Jean-Claude Cartier a truly formidable opponent.

Special Equipment Or Enhancements: neural jack with a subdermal link to a subdermacomp. Chipped skills: translator chip (French/English), translator chip (German/French), reference chip (genetics/cybernetics) all chipped skills are at level 3. Subdermatalk: range 20 km, four channels - one secured

SEAN MITCHELL

Body Type: Mesomorph Age: 45 Career: Net Runner/New Dawn Terrorist

Primary Skills: Intellectual-4 (Computer-5)

Secondary: Underworld-2

Physical Attributes: 2 Mental Attributes: 3

Motivations: Diamond Queen, Diamond 2

Notes: Mitchell is driven by a strong desire to overcome what he would term as the "lesser sex". Arrogant and self-involved, Mitchell prides himself as being the best there is at what he does, hack mainframes and seduce women. Perhaps, the trait which makes Mitchell truly dangerous is his unswerving sense of ultimate profit. Cost-concious, he will readily abandon one avenue of pursuit for another if it will allow him to achieve his goals at a lower rate of expenditure. Only in the realm of romance does this trait alter.

Special Equipment Or Enhancements: neural jack equipped with a linking subdermacomp. A monofilament garrote in right thumb.

THE KAFER CONNECTION NPC FILE

TERRENCE DUVAL

Body Type: Mesomorph Age: 33 Career: Field Agent

Primary Skills: Combat-4

Secondary: Underworld-2

Physical Attributes: 3 Mental Attributes: 2

Motivations: Joker, Clubs 7

Notes: Duval is a quiet, seldom outspoken type who perceives the world in extremes - black and white. To him there is no room for shades of gray or altering points of view. His association with Cartier is purely one of an employer to an employee. Cartier instructs him to do a job and Duval accomplishes the task, no questions asked. In payment for his excellent service Cartier had Duval cybernetically enhanced. In reality, what Cartier did was encase Duval's relentless single-mindedness within a body of steel. As a result, what little humanity Duval once possessed is now utterly gone.

Special Equipment Or Enhancements: Duval's arms and legs have been replaced with shining silver cybernetic analogues with a strength of 24. In addition, his body has been encased within a titanium exoframe which allows him to utilize his incredible strength to it's fullest advantage. Additionally, Duval's head and neck have been similarly armored, giving him a body-wide armor value of 1.0. It should be stressed that these enhancements are experimental and on the cutting edge of cybertronics. In addition, the cost to Duval's sanity has been extreme. He is under constant pain and requires continually higher dosages of pain killers to simply operate. Finally, Duval is subject to frequent bursts of rage and frustration when the pain becomes too great, especially during melee combat.

Duval's eyes and ears have also been replaced and he possesses a neural jack which he uses exclusively with his Mueller-Rivera F-19 laser rifle.

DOCTOR NUNHAN SUNN

Body Type: Endomorph Age: 70 Career: Cybersurgeon/New Dawn Terrorist

Primary Skill: Medical-5

Secondary: Cybernetics-4

Physical Attributes: 3 Mental Attributes: 3

Motivations: Spades Queen, Clubs Queen

Notes: Born from Euro-asian stock, Sunn was raised in the streets of Hong Kong until his parents died in a terrorist bombing of the army hospital they worked in. Sunn escaped and retreated to the streets. As he grew he developed an affinity toward medicine and applied his talents to study at the University of Manchuria. Since that time, Sunn has become one of the world's foremost professors of Provolutionist Dogma.

Sunn is a man who is as dangerous as he is talented, largely because he will allow nothing to stand in the way of him achieving his goals. A stubborn man known for his tenacity, it is nearly impossible to change his mind from a given course once it has been set in motion. It is this trait which has earned him the title of "Juggernaut".

Although Sunn professes Provolution as the next step for mankind, he himself bears no such enhancements as those whom he has "created", such as Terrence Duval. Instead, Sunn prefers to remain "Human", and surrounds himself with an entorage of cyber-warriors.

The core of Sunn's operations lies within the heart of Libreville. Operating out of a small bookshoppe called "Leftwing Books", Sunn personally screens those who would dare to request the services of the Juggernaut. Those who pass his examination may have what ever enhancements they desire, but for an unusual price: one favor, to be called in at any moment and payed without regret, without remorse, and without refusal. It is this kind of fee that has made Sunn the man he is today.

TAI SUNN

Body Type: Normal Age: 28 Career: Field Agent/New Dawn Terrorist

Primary Skill: Underworld-3

Secondary: Combat-2

Physical Attributes: 3 Mental Attributes: 3

Motivations: Clubs 8, Spades 8

Notes: Daughter and only child of Nunhan Sunn, Tai Sunn learned at an early age the radical precepts of her father and quickly adopted them. Operating as her father's eyes, ears, and voice within the New Dawn, she often assumes his place when he can not.

Tai Sunn is a woman who has been hardened by years of constant conflict and readily accepts violence as a means of solving problems. She also has a strong desire to impress her father in any way possible and openly seeks places of power and responsibility to facilitate this desire.

caused by the Kafers alerts the PCs indirectly that something more than a simple power failure is wrong. Cartier and Sunn also sense this and proceed to secure aid from Earth by reaching the communications room.

From this point on it is really up to the PCs to decide what to do next. If they move to take leadership of the situation, Cartier will join them, and use them to gain access to the communications room. If the PCs begin to really slaughter the Kafers, Cartier will intervene and introduce himself as a director of the IEX and claim responsibility for the safe transport of the Kafers. If pressed, Cartier will transfer any blame of the Kafers' freedom on the short-sightedness of the IEX and claim that in reality he is nothing more than a bureaucrat trying to do his job. Above all else, Cartier *must* sound sincere and convincing so that he may gain the confidence of the party. If the PCs insist on destroying the Kafers, Cartier will insist that any deaths which resulted in their escape will become meaningless, if not a single Kafer remains to be studied.

GOALS OF THE ADVENTURE

The primary goal of the PCs should be to survive and get safely off the beanstalk.

Their secondary goal may be the safety of the passengers. It should be stressed that these other people are very likely to panic, be uncooperative, and provide almost as much difficulty for the PCs as the Kafers. And, of course, there is still the crew, who can provide the Director with the proper "examples", if you will, so that the Director may illustrate to the PC's the dangers they face, without necessarily endangering them directly. This is easily achieved by having the crew prevent the PC's from entering dangerous situations while they themselves go off to investigate...and get blasted by the Kafers, hopefully leaving the PCs with the definite sense of "Oh boy...now what?"

A third goal, which may be resolved later, might be to find out, "Who the heck is this IEX guy, anyway?"

And thus the plot thickens. For, once the PCs take an active role in the supression of the Kafers, they will have learned too much, and, as such outside knowledge is a liability in Cartier's plans, the PCs become liabilities to Cartier. Liabilities that must be removed.

HANDLING RAMBONE THE PC

When thrown into this kind of situation there will most certainly be one PC who will claim that he never goes anywhere without his M-2 assault rifle that his beloved father gave him while they lived on the frontier. Your response should be as follows. "That's right. But since personal weapons aren't allowed in the staterooms, I suppose you'll just have to go down into the cargo bay and get it." Getting the weapons shouldn't be impossible, but it shouldn't be easy either. The only exception to the no weapons in the stateroom rule is if one of the PCs is still actively working for a government agency, ie: the Texas Rangers. Members of such agencies are usually given permits to carry concealable sidearms.

THE KAFERS

There are ten Kafers held within the storage bay. One of the Kafers is a natural leader and has a constant intelligence of 10. Among the Kafer artifacts are two "horse pistols" and four "thud guns" (see **The Kafer Sourcebook** for details). All are fully loaded (this may be modified, depending on the strength of the party).

When handling the Kafers, do not treat them as stupid and spoiling for a fight. They will react with uncanny tactical precision. They will utilize the ducting vents for moving from one floor to the next. They will hide, play dead, or lure the PCs in with hostages. And they will single out and pursue those passengers with the most fight in them (hopefully the PCs). They will use intimidation tactics, and will attempt to trap the PCs and use their own fear against them.

If the PCs are wiping the Kafers out, save your Kafers by having them withdraw and double back. Above all else you must see that at least two Kafers survive for Cartier to use later. Other than that, have fun.

IN THE COMMUNICATIONS ROOM

Once brought to the communications room, Cartier "jacks-in" the computer and sends a message to his operatives within the BWRD to send aid in the form of troops and interface vehicles. These troops are lead by Terrence Duval.

When the troops arrive, the PCs are taken aboard a vehicle and taken to a secret IEX installation where they are debrieled. Their debriefing and what follows is covered in **Part II: List Of Betrayal**. The passengers who are still alive are also taken to the surface, quickly debrieled, and released with the knowledge that it was a terrorist attack on the beanstalk, not Kafers, which caused the disturbance. This same story is disclosed to the media.

Note that if at any time the PCs attempt to gain further information on Cartier through the computer net, they will find that he is everything he says he is - clean as a whistle.

CONCLUSION

It will take at least five hours for an interface vehicle to ready, launch, and rendezvous with the capsule once Cartier has sent his message. During this time it is recommended that all wounded PCs get some form of treatment from the first aid supplies available in the communications room.

In response to the PCs' aid in containing the Kafers, Cartier will promise some form of compensation for their efforts. What form it will take is discussed in **Part II: List Of Betrayal**. In the meantime, award experience and prepare for what's in store. ●

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BIRD OF PREY PART II

A new alien race in detail for *MegaTraveller*

by: John Fernandes



BIRD OF PREY - PART II

AESR CHARACTER GENERATION

Aesr characters are generated as human characters with the following modifications:

A. Strength is generated at 2D6-2 (minimum of 2). Dexterity is generated at 2D6+2.

B. At age 6+1D6, an As must commence rolling for enlistment in the military. Enlistment rolls are at 2D6-2 and there is no draft available. If, for any reason, a character fails to be accepted into the military by the end of age 12, he or she is considered to be a non-citizen and Social Status is rerolled on 1D6, and can never be higher than 6 at any time thereafter. Military service is for a two year period (use basic or advanced character generation), after which an As is free to choose his or her own direction in life. (Enlistment in the military is now considered re-enlistment if the same service is chosen.) Failure to pass the survival roll(s) during this short enlistment result in the character losing citizenship as above with all consequences in effect (see "Bird Of Prey - Part I", *Voyages #7*).

C. Aesr are instinctive pilots and on any successful skill roll, the referee should allow players to acquire Pilot Skill at the players' option.

D. Aesr players can convert Brawling Skill to Aerial Combat Skill at their option. Aerial Combat is a special Aesr skill which acts as a die modifier when engaging in combat while airborne. It should nullify to the extent of skill level the negative effects of attempting combat tasks while in the air (firing weapons, engaging in hand-to-hand, etc.). Aerial Combat should also count as Zero-G Combat-1.

E. Aesr should be allowed to attempt careers as "Ancientologists". Use the Scientist option in basic character generation or treat as a Scout career with specialty in medicine (Ancientology). Treat Medical School as the "Foundation For The Advancement Of Ancients Knowledge". Treat the Medical-3 skill award as player's choice from **Technical**, **Exploratory**, or **Science** cascade skills. Then procede with a Scout career with Special Duty or Wartime Missions counting as assignments to the FSSG.

AESR SPACE CRAFT

Variable thrust pylons are used on Aesr space craft up to 5000 tons displacement and on SDBs. Aesr engineers discovered that by mounting the engines of spacecraft on rotating pylons (similar in appearance to enormous axles), the maneuverability of these craft is significantly enhanced, as their performance is, in many ways, similar to that of VTOL aircraft with variable thrust. This does, however, put considerable additional strain on the structures of these vessels as well as on inertial compensators, and often on the physical well being of the crewmembers. The Aesr have found that this enhanced agility takes greater advantage of the instinctive Aesr flying abilities and native toughness.

It is a common tactic of Aesr SDB pilots to vector a ship's engines ninety degrees perpendicular to a flight path, hold the ship ninety degrees to the right or left, and then apply full acceleration. The effect is nothing less than astounding. It is nearly impossible for a missile to strike an Aesr vessel which is not taken by surprise as the missile's agility is no match for a trained Aesr pilot with a strong sense of self-preservation.

AESR CRAFT DESIGN MODIFICATION

To illustrate this craft technology, increase the cost of the engines of all Aesr craft so equipped by ten percent and increase Agility by one. The volume of the engines must also be increased by fifteen percent to accomodate the massive pylon mounts. This should be offset by the fact that Aesr are small beings and require only sixty percent of the volume of humans in crew and passenger accomodations and facilities.

ANCIENTS INSTITUTE

Due to the widespread Aesr belief that they are the product of genetic manipulation by the Ancients, and also due to the large number of Ancients sites discovered in the Yggdrssyl system, many Aesr have dedicated themselves to the better understanding of the culture and science of their forebearers.

The Foundation For The Advancement Of Ancients Knowledge is an organization dedicated to the preservation of Ancients sites and artifacts, the seeking out of Ancients sites in other systems, and collaberation with scientists and sophontologists of other races to regain the wealth of this lost technology and culture. The knowledge is then disseminated throughout the known galaxy.

The activities of this foundation are many and varied. They include:

1. The systematic re-investigation and re-study of previously located Ancients sites and artifacts in order to catalogue existing knowledge and prevent further decay or destruction of known sites or objects, as well as to prevent wanton looting or missappropriation of priceless and irreplaceable artifacts.

2. The explorative search for and verification of previously unknown or unrecognized sites or artifacts, and the protection of these from unscrupulous exploitation, mindless destruction, or decay.

3. To bring together in one place all existing knowledge of the Ancients gathered from thousands of sources in the hope of gaining a clearer, more in depth picture of the Ancients' physiology, psychology, philosophy, art, science, and culture and to make this information available, at minimum cost, to any individual or institution which can show a legitimate interest, without regard to species, political affiliation, or any other condition other than valid academic study.

Individual membership in the foundation for those other than native Aesr is possible through personal invitation by the governing body on Asgar. This is offered from time to time to individuals who, in the opinion of that body, have

made some outstanding contribution to the advancement of Ancients knowledge and with whom the foundation wishes to establish a mutually rewarding working relationship.

The foundation's headquarters are located at Azgar on the edge of the extra-territorial, alien enclave at the orbiting capitol's starport facility.

The foundation compound may be entered either through the enclave or from outside it and, within certain limits, aliens are free to go about unmolested.

Within the compound are classrooms, research laboratories, recreation areas, libraries, dormatories, warehouses, restaurants; in short, all the facilities one would expect to find at a modern, interstellar university.

The compound also contains the fabulous Azgar Museum Of Ancients Knowledge. This imposing ediface, aloof in its own clear and impenetrable dome within the vast, dispersed structure of Azgar's orbiting capitol, contains the greatest collection of Ancients treasures amassed anywhere in known space since the demise of that great and tragic race.

REFEREES ONLY:

There is a darker side to the activities of the foundation that is not readily evident. There is still a strong distrust of outsiders among Aesr which manifests itself as a desire to never again be overwhelmed by superior technology.

Much Ancients knowledge has been lost in the past because the function of many Ancient artifacts was incomprehensible. The Aesr know that Ancient weapons and tools are often indistinguishable from works of art or items of decoration, and that the destructive power of many Ancient weapons is beyond belief.

The foundation acts as a perfect blind for the screening of Ancient objects for those with possible military potential. Artifacts found in alien sites or brought in by alien researchers for study and classification are screened in this way, as well as items discovered by the Aesr themselves.

After screening, these "special difficulty" (high priority) items are politely transferred to a top security area of the museum. The actual discoverers are well paid for their trouble and rewared by being given other, more glamorous projects to work on. They are told that the item in question bears a resemblance to certain other artifacts and for that reason it has been assigned to a team more familiar with its possible function. Hints are also made that the item may be dangerous and that this is another reason why specific care should be taken that no one be placed in jeopardy. This statement is, in large part, true!

FOUNDATION SPECIAL STUDY GROUP

The Special Study Group (FSSG) is more familiar with items of military value. Their sole job is to ascertain and exploit this value in the interest of Azgar security. It is a long standing military axiom that technological advantages are the shortest lived. Ways to copy or counter an advanced weapon are found quickly. (There is, after all, an enormous incentive!)

The FSSG seeks to understand various Ancient weapons, copy them if possible, or find ways to counter them. This is to be accomplished in an atmosphere of the greatest possible secrecy.

The foundation will go to any lengths to prevent knowledge of this Special Study Group and its discoveries from leaking out to alien intelligence agencies. Aesr special intelligence operatives will dare any danger in defense of Azgar. They are highly trained, skillful, resourceful, intensely loyal, fanatically brave, and utterly ruthless!



USING THE FOUNDATION IN ADVENTURES

There are many ways to use the foundation in an existing *Traveller* campaign. It can serve as a patron, sending Aesr or non-Aesr characters to investigate, verify, or transport some valuable artifacts from an archeological site. The players may or may not be aware of the significance of the item in question.

A party may be intelligence operatives investigating or attempting to obtain information concerning the foundation or its clandestine operations.

The party may be hired to track down felons escaping with objects or information the Aesr want kept secret.

The player characters could be archeologists who lose an item to the foundation and want it back, or at least want to know what has happened to it.

The characters may be Aesr special-intel-operatives determined to obtain or retain some vital Ancient object in a do-or-die situation against equally determined opposition.

AESR ADVENTURE SCENARIO

The following is an adventure for three to eight Aesr characters generated as Ancientologists.

BACKGROUND:

The characters are stationed on board an Aesr survey ship similar to the survey ship illustrated in **Grand Survey** or the lab ship illustrated in the *MegaTraveller* **Referee's Manual**.

The referee should make it clear to each player what their attitude is toward the Joturs and the Genocidal War. The group should be fairly evenly divided between the following attitudes:

1. "The war has been over a long time. We completely wiped out the Jotun culture and civilization. This may or may not have been justified at the time, but that time is past. The utter destruction of the Joturs is not an achievement to be proud of and the whole subject is best left alone. I don't want to be reminded of it any more than I must. The war is over. Let what is past remain in the past."

2. "The Joturs' crimes were unforgivable. We can never let ourselves or our children forget what was done to us. We must honor the sacrifices of our antecedants and let their memory constantly serve to rededicate us to the preservation of our liberty and our way of life. We cannot allow ourselves to become complacent. The universe is still a dangerous place and who knows when we might once again be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect and preserve our people."

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS:

The Aesr party is passing time at an A or B class starport while their vessel undergoes routine maintenance. While eating dinner at a comfortable restaurant they are approached by a local who shows a sincere interest in making their acquaintance. He offers to buy a round for them if he may only ask a few questions.

The senior ranking member of the party believes him to be harmless. (Roll reaction for the other characters with a -2 adjustment.)

The visitor relates that he is a local historian and newscaster and would be honored if the group would consent to making this into an informal interview (nothing for broadcast, of course!), because he has never before had the opportunity to actually speak with an As, let alone a whole group! The subject of the Aesr holocaust and the Genocidal War has always fascinated him. He has always wondered, for instance, what present day Aesr feel about the war and what their opinions are concerning their future relationship with their neighbors and what the average As thinks about the nearby Imperium's present civil war and its repercussions for this relationship. He is frank and seems genuinely interested.

(This is an opportunity for the referee to draw out the players and get them to vocalize their characters' feelings concerning the war, and hopefully start an argument or two among them. Aesr, of course, would never come to blows or even raise their voices against one another in the presence of aliens and the referee should be sure to remind the senior member of the group of this before the incident.)

The dinner party breaks up with much left unsaid as the senior As reminds the others of their duties on board ship and that they are scheduled to relieve the watch in a few hours. He wants them sober, wide awake, and ready for duty. He apologizes to the newscaster and the group returns to the ship.

A NEW ASSIGNMENT

Upon arrival they are met with an astounding piece of news. A message from the foundation informs them of the existance of a small Jotun community in a star system 5 to 8 parsecs from their present position. They are to be given the honor of being the first Aesr in hundreds of years to actually see a living Jotun! They are to make all prudent haste to this system to observe them and to send back to Azgar any and all information that may be available concerning this community.

The group is to exercise its own initiative concerning physical contact. Orders are purposefully vague at present due to the uproar this discovery has caused on Azgar. The orders caution that whatever they do, these may be the last Joturs in existance anywhere, and their actions may have far-reaching consequences.

The effect should be electrifying. The argument of the previous night takes on a whole new meaning!

REFEREE'S INFORMATION:

The Jotun community consists of the last surviving members of the crew of a Jotun scientific expedition. This expedition, privately funded, was seeking knowledge concerning the ecological status of Azgar.

Jotunheim was a dying world, slowly poisoning itself with its own industrial pollution. A group of Jotun scientists and astronomers became obsessed with knowing more about the strange and unnatural conditions existing on Azgar, as well as the wealth of evidence concerning the presence of Ancient ruins throughout the Yggdrssyl system.

The plan was this: To travel far enough out from Yggdrssyl to catch the light from it as if it were caught in a time trap. (Since starships travel faster than light, it is

possible that, if you travel far enough, the light from distant stars will be seen as it existed hundreds, even thousands of years ago.) Their twenty year mission was to study the star as it existed 2500 years ago and by jumping back closer and closer, to take snapshots of the star's radiation at various times since then, and in so doing, get a clearer idea of exactly what caused the sudden shift in Azgar's axial tilt.

They succeeded! Their findings were revolutionary. In a nutshell, this is what they concluded:

1. Azgar was purposefully altered by an outside agency (probably the Ancients), and that Adumla (the red dwarf) was hurled into the Gamma Scorpio system in just such a way as to cause a drastic change in the axial tilt of Azgar.

2. This tilt started as a small wobble and became greater and greater with each passing century.

3. This wobble has either reached, or will reach its maximum effect in only a few more decades and that as time goes on will slowly become less and less.

4. Azgar can expect to experience a gradual softening of its harsh and dramatic climate.

5. This softening will continue until Azgar returns to its original angle of 14 degrees off perpendicular.

6. This should result in a gradual stabilizing of Azgar's climate and the world should become a much more habitable place over the course of the next three to five millenia.

(Aesr will only take this to mean that they have passed the ordeals of Azgar and found the paradise their holy leaders and prophets had forseen for them so long ago.)

When the expedition was approximately two standard years out from Jotunheim, a misjump sent them hurtling off course and they were never heard from again.

The information concerning Azgar is available in the ruin of their starship, but even they no longer know of its existance. The wreck was covered over with soil over a century ago as a shrine to those who did not survive, and only the fragmentary archives hold the secret to this mound's contents.

PROGRESSION AND CONCLUSION:

Half of the party should be bent on the destruction of this community of three-hundred or so Jotuns. The other half should be just as determined to leave them in peace. Will the Aesr discover the wonderful news or will their people have to wait many more centuries before they learn the truth?

The referee is encouraged to throw in one more factor: the appearance of a Darrian patrol frigate, the captain of which will demand that the Red Zone quarantine be respected.

This adventure should be played for the drama, and much depends on the players' characters holding to their established beliefs. Only if the players "role-play" will the adventure be completed effectively.

The Aesr are a proud and sensitive people possessing a high intellect and sense of duty. The fact that their emotions and conditioning sometimes get the better of them makes them more fascinating to play and referee. ●

THE JOTUN COMMUNITY

It is recommended that the referee place the community on Torment (0721), in the Darrian Subsector of the Spinward Marches. The Darrians have made the planet a Red Zone and it is officially listed as an Exile Camp. The Darrians chose to keep the existance of the Jotuns a secret in order to prevent useless bloodshed. The referee should play up the diplomatic consequences of this discovery and the players should be gently nudged into taking whatever action their characters' consciences dictate.

Torment: Darrian Subsector (0721) X-233231 4 Poor/Non-industrial/Exile Camp



JOTUN STATISTICS:

Strength = 2D6+5
Dexterity = 2D6-2
Other stats as normal.

The Jotuns are a race of giant reptilian carnivores. They have developed a tribal society in the harsh environment in which they have been cast and will view the arrival of the Aesr with fear and suspicion. They will react violently at the slightest provocation.

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VAMPIRES IN SPACE?!

Adding an element of gothic horror to your sci-fi or science fantasy gaming

by Anthony D. Ward



The three Bonded Troubleshooters (BTS) of the small Three Gold Hearts Independent BTS Agency were sure they had finally solved a case that would make them the newest supernovas in the Solar CyberNet. When the Mitsubishi-Chrysler Intersystem flunky had originally hired them to investigate the puzzle of MCI's continuing loss of several kilotonnes of protein per year while it was being shipped between the High Montana Biological and Agricultural Station and the Iaccoca Orbital Industrial Facility, Black Ruby had wanted nothing to do with the job. "I didn't work my arse off for three years getting my BTS license just to use it to track down missing meat", was the way she had delicately put it. But her partners, Takiuchi John and Neuwhin Tze Fong, had finally convinced her that they should take the case. As John said, "While it doesn't look like the Crime of the Millenium, the job should keep our agency's air taxes paid for the next fifty years".

John's observation, and the others' agreement with him, just proved that none of the three BTS agents had the slightest trace of Precognitive Talent. Because, after five grueling weeks of investigation and research, and some minor criminal activities, they knew they were approaching the Big Score! Their names were going down in history alongside those of Sherlock Holmes, Sam Spade, and David Addison! All they had to do was capture just one of the suspects and every CyberNet rider in the System, from Mercury Power Station to the Oort Cloud miners, would be coming to Three Gold Hearts Agency with their problems. And more importantly, with their money.

As the three agents slowly froze to death hiding inside the cold storage food locker, waiting for their suspects to show up, they rechecked their special "weapons" for the thousandth time. Ruby had the water pistol filled with water that had been blessed by a Shinto Priest, John had the garlic powder dispenser, and Tze had the crossbow with the wooden quarrels. They were hot! They were ready! They were sure that they were prepared to take the first known gang of astrovampires into custody. And launch themselves into BTS history.

But, unfortunately, as every sane individual knows, there are no such things as vampires or astrovampires. So, after the two surviving BTS agents got out of the Iaccoca's medsection, they knew they had to rethink their entire scenario. Especially since all their monetary advance had just gone for their medical bills and, eventually, Fong would need to have a new body cloned and his brain unfrozen. . .

• • • • • •

I must admit that as a GM, I do love *GURPS*. I especially love the way *GURPS* allows me to mix together different genre. Whether it is mixing SF with horror, or cyberpunk with swords and sorcery, I try to never let my players relax by knowing just what it is that I am going to throw at them next. As in the above *Cyberpunk* game, when my intrepid players ran into a gang of what seemed to them to be some type of astrovampires, they immediately thought they knew how to handle the situation. Unfortunately for them, what the BTS agents had thought to be vampires were actually just a minor, genetically engineered subrace of human beings called Viroids. All the Holy water did was make the Viroids wet, the garlic powder did cause one with an allergy to start sneezing, and two of the gang did get skewered with wooden arrows, though neither seriously. About all my players' actions did was make the Viroids mad. So it was quickly back to the drawing board for the three intrepid BTS agents. But what if I'd really wanted to put astrovampires in the game?

Below are two sets of racial characteristics for using either type of "vampire" in a space, cyberpunk, future horror, or even just a real strange science fantasy *GURPS* game. Remember, never let your players know which race you are using until the *climactic*

moment. Possibly just after a player character has thrown a beaker of Holy water into a Viroid's face or shot an astrovampire with an AKM-99 assault rifle. Then let them find out. Just don't forget to laugh in a suitably evil manner as you do it!

ASTROVAMPIRE 100 PNTS

The astrovampire is the "standard", gothic vampire from all the bad movies, TV, and horror novels. Basic information about these creatures can be found in *GURPS HORROR*, pages 42-44. While these beings are evil, they are not stupid. So we can imagine that as our technology advances and Humanity moves into space, so will the race of vampires. They will become astrovampires!

All the traditional magical powers that vampires are supposed to have (see the sidebars on *GURPS HORROR* pages 42, 43) may or may not operate in space. It is up to the individual GM to decide how much manna there is in space and which powers their vampires will have. But remember, while the Lunar and other planetary surfaces may be rich in manna, there can't be much manna in the vacuum of space. However, the astrovampire will always have the following characteristics in any space, science fantasy, or cyberpunk campaign.

ADVANTAGES

The *average* astrovampire has ST 20, DX 12, IQ 12, and HT 18. Vampires also have a natural DR of 2 and the advantages of Night Vision, Immunity to Disease, and Acceleration Tolerance. They do not age and they *may* possess extensive magical powers (see above). They also have Free Fall skill. (The ability to fly as a bat does help a lot when maneuvering in microgravity, even while in Humanoid form.)

Vampires are not affected by weapons that fire metal or other nonorganic materials, not even magical ones (unless the GM rules that silver causes the astrovampire problems). Weapons firing organic materials, such as wood or organic plastics, do full effect damage, as do magical, psionic, and energy (laser, directed energy beam weaponry, etc.) attacks.

The image of a vampire cannot be captured by mechanical, electronic, or any nonorganic means. A vampire may have his or her portrait painted by an organic being, but a vampire's image cannot be seen in a mirror or captured by a video or film camera, and the vampire cannot be detected by electronic intelligences, such as computers or robots.

DISADVANTAGES

An astrovampire is affected by ultraviolet (UV) radiation. The hull of a space ship, the walls of a space or planetary colony, and the skin of a heavy space suit all provide the vampire with full protection from UV radiation. However, unless the suit helmet is totally opaque to UV, the vampire takes one point of damage to the head every 30 minutes. A vampire in a light suit is subjected to one point of damage for every 15 minutes of direct exposure to UV. A vampire can reduce this damage to one point every hour by placing his native soil in both of the suit's boots.

A vampire loses one point of HT every 24 hours while within four astronomical units (AU) of any star that emits heavy amounts of UV radiation. These UV stars are normally O, B, A, F, and G class. The HT loss rate falls to one HT every 72 hours when the vampire is located anywhere from four AU to the edge of the stellar system. For K class stars, divide the above loss rates by 2. For M class stars, divide by 4. This loss rate drops to one point of HT every 168 hours in interstellar space.

An astrovampire can only replace his HT loss by drinking the blood of a suitable victim. The HT loss can be halted, but not replaced, by drinking a suitable synthetic liquid protein every 24 hours. The GM decides what is "suitable" in either case.

STOPPING AN ASTROVAMPIRE

While it may be a fairly arduous task for player characters to find sufficient wood or other organic material in a space ship or artificial colony to create an effective anti-vampire impaling weapon, it is not that difficult for characters to use modern or futuristic technology to generate UV radiation. UV lasers are an astrovampire's biggest fear. Besides the normal damage done by the laser, an extra 2D6 damage bonus is added when using a UV laser.

If an astrovampire is exposed to raw vacuum, he loses one HT per second until his HT reaches zero, at which point he turns to dust.

Unfortunately, the old standby of using Holy symbols may or may not stop an astrovampire. Both the vampire and symbol wielder must be Believers, and with the expected growth of secular humanism and agnosticism in the future, this may be a problem. Therefore, the effects of Holy symbols on astrovampires are left to the GM's discretion.

VIROIDS 45 POINTS

Everyone knows how even the best present day companies sometimes produce products that don't quite meet specifications. Look at the number of automobile recalls there are each year. When the future biological and genetic engineering firms create new and wondrous living entities, Murphy's Law will insure there are always going to be a few "bugs" in the final products. And when the genengineering companies are cut rate, less than fully ethical, and/or "gray market", the chances of error are increased.

For instance, in 2040, a less than ethical space line (namely Kwanga, O'Hara and Hong, Space Merchants, Limited) went to one of the less than ethical genengineering firms and placed an order for the development of the "perfect" space crew personnel. Theo Kiromitsu and Associates, Biological Productions, almost fully succeeded with their contract. But, while TK&A did produce a race of excellent spacers (and slaves), the

new Viroid race did have a few idiosyncrasies, both planned and unplanned.

To the casual observer, a Viroid looks like any fairly normal human being. That is, of one's standard of "normal human" runs to tall, thin people with very dark hair, red-brown eyes, and very pale skin. But, though they do have quicker than average reflexes and their incisor teeth do seem just a bit overdeveloped, there is nothing overtly monstrous or strange in their appearance.

The principle physical difference between humans and Viroids is the Viroids' digestive systems. To cut down on expenses, simplify shipboard supply, and more easily keep the Viroids under their owner's control, Viroids were supposedly designed to be able to digest only an artificially produced, liquid protein food. Though their digestive systems cannot handle any solid foods or carbohydrates, they can, however, due to just a little sloppiness at TK&A during their creation, absorb most proteins in liquid form. In any high tech culture, a food processing machine that can liquify proteins is easily found. That is, if those desiring such a machine are near civilization. If not, there is always the "old, traditional" method of finding food. Any type of Terrestrial blood will do, even animal blood.



The Viroids have one other physical "defect" that was designed in to increase their controllability. Their bodies lack the ability to repair damage done by ultraviolet radiation. Their eyes and skin are a lot more sensitive to UV than even that of albino humans. But dark glasses, a strong sun screen, or just staying out of direct sunlight can alleviate most of these problems.

VIROID HISTORY

DATE	EVENT
21 MAY 2040	Theo Kiromitsu and Associates, Biological Productions are tasked to genengineer a new race of Spacers by Kwanga, O'Hara, and Hong, Space Merchants, Limited.
31 JUL 2041	Prototype male and female Viroids are produced at the TK&A asteroid bio production facility.
13 FEB 2043	102 Viroids are successfully decanted.
22 JUN 2051	The 93 surviving Viroids are turned over to KOH.
06 AUG 2059	First KOH ship crewed by Viroids disappears.
24 SEP 2059	KOH Space Ship *PENSACOLA MARU* captured by unknown pirates. Passengers eventually ransomed, but Viroid crew disappears along with *PENSACOLA MARU* and pirates.
2060 - 2072	Seven other KOH ships taken by pirates.
2060 - 2069	Viroids set up a "colony" on one of the smaller moons of Saturn. Colony not self-sufficient in food production, due to the Viroid need for protein as a food source.
2066 - 2072	Mitsubishi-Chrysler Intersystem loses kilotonnes of protein during shipment.
10 FEB 2072	Three Gold Hearts Independent BTS Agency hired by MCI to solve the mystery.

ADVANTAGES

A Viroid gets a -1 to ST, +2 to DX, +1 to IQ, and -1 to HT. As part of their genetic design as Spacers, they have the Advantages of Acceleration Tolerance, Alertness +2, Ambidexterity, Immunity to Disease, Mathematical Ability, Rapid Healing, and 3D Spatial Sense. They also have a natural Free Fall skill of +2.

DISADVANTAGES

The Viroids also have genetic Disadvantages. They include Bad Sight (unshielded UV radiation blinds them within 1D6 minutes), Inability to Stand Direct UV Radiation (unshielded, continuous UV exposure causes skin cancer within 1D6 days and kill them in 2D6 weeks), and Sense of Inferiority. Also, in a gravity field of more than 0.5G, Viroids suffer a -1 to their DX and HT scores. These decrements do not take effect upon the average Viroid if the G field is caused by acceleration that lasts less than 1D6 hours.

Their greatest Disadvantage is social. They have a secret. As an artificially produced race, in many Universes they have few or no civil rights. As escaped "slaves", their original owners are continually looking for them. And to many humans, their means of digestion causes disgust. The first reaction can kill them, the second can return them to slavery, and the third can cause them to be ostracized by normal Humanity. The Viroids will do almost anything to protect their secret, including killing any discoverers. ●

Life for heroes of the rebellion is never easy. For these champions of galactic freedom, even simple assignments have a way of becoming the last, desparate hope of entire worlds.

A STAR WARS ADVENTURE

A WORLD IN REVOLT

by James B. King

ADVENTURE SCRIPT

On the world of Linholm, in an empty warehouse . . .

GM: The general had made the assignment sound simple enough. Fly a light freighter loaded with a crated cargo of blaster rifles and carbines, safely and inconspicuously marked as HEAVY-DUTY INDUSTRIAL LUBRICANTS, to Linholm, in the Mediraan system, secure the ship in port, and meet a rebel contact at warehouse block 26 for further instructions on offloading the cargo. Yeah, that sounded simple enough. But things haven't seemed right from the moment you appeared high above the planet. Near-space was crowded with Imperial craft, though, oddly enough, none harrassed you. The overly tense port authorities didn't even complete proper procedures before granting you landing clearance. The scene at the port and on the streets of Synia was one of tension and confusion - and looked like a battle zone. Stormtroopers, complete with threatening posture, were thicker than fleas on a bantha. And now, after being questioned by patrols five times along the way, you've arrived at warehouse block 26 to find it empty . . .

1st Rebel: From the looks of this city, I won't be surprised if our rebel contact has completed his last assignment.

2nd Rebel: Yea, this place looks like a total riot zone. It looks like the local underground rebelled against the Imperials prematurely.

3rd Rebel: Not likely. Remember, there's an Alliance team here advising and training the underground guerrillas.

4th Rebel: There's obviously been a riot, and we know martial law is in effect. If the underground didn't trigger it, something else sure did.

3rd Rebel: Well, we got this far okay, and the warehouse isn't full of stormtroopers. Hopefully that means that the underground organization and the rebel team haven't been compromised.

2nd Rebel: Yeah? Well, if that's the case, where's our rebel contact?

GM: Your conversation is interrupted by the sounds of many booted feet pounding the fusion-formed surface outside, and by the unmistakable clatter of stormtrooper body armor.

1st Rebel: Oh, bantha cakes! These guys show up on every assignment we undertake!

4th Rebel: And thanks to martial law, we couldn't leave the port with a single weapon. We always end up in this kind of situation!

2nd Rebel: Unarmed and about to die. And to think I wanted to be a hero.

GM: As the pounding and clatter stops outside the entrance, you faintly hear a muffled command, "If they resist arrest, blast 'em!" At that moment, a grating noise behind you draws your attention to a small section of the floor that is withdrawing from sight. As the warehouse entrance door begins to lift, a blaster toting youth appears from the opening, waving at you frantically. "Come quickly - we can escape this way!"

EPISODE ONE: ESCAPE BELOW

Summary

In this first episode, the PCs escape an Imperial trap by descending into the service tunnels beneath the city, but are pursued by stormtroopers. They escape after setting two trooper squads firing on each other.

Start The Adventure

Use the script at the beginning of this adventure to start play. Assign the parts as necessary so that all parts are read. Either photocopy the script or have the players read their parts from the magazine. You are now ready to begin Encounter 1 below.

Encounter 1: Escape Down The Tunnel

Faced with few options, the PCs should opt to follow the youth. Read aloud the bold paragraph below.

With stormtroopers about to attack at any second, one by one, you begin clamoring down a ladder into what looks like a utilities service tunnel. But just as the last rebel is about to descend, two stormtroopers suddenly appear, with several more not far behind. "They're escaping!" the lead trooper exclaims hollowly through his helmet speaker. "Quick, blast him!"

The last PC may choose to either jump wrecklessly into the hole, or attempt to climb down the ladder under fire (Range is 20 meters). Jumping into the tunnel (depth can not be determined due to poor lighting) should be considered a Haste Action. Only the trooper who gave the command to fire is making a Haste Action, so only he can fire in this event. As the distance to the bottom is almost six meters, the PC must roll 3D damage against STR.

If the PC climbs down the ladder, he is open to fire from two troopers for two rounds. A Haste Action reduces fire to one round, but the climb then requires a roll against DEX to avoid falling (7+). Failure requires a 3D damage roll. The PC falls if he is stunned or wounded by blaster fire.

Read aloud the paragraph below.

As soon as everyone is down the tunnel, the youth presses a button in an open panel box, and the warehouse floor access hatch slides shut just as stormtrooper helmets become visible above. Moving fast, the youth removes a shoulder bag and dumps its contents onto the floor - three blaster pistols and two medpacs, and adds to the pile his shoulder-slung blaster rifle. "We must move quickly!" the youth exclaims. Then, pointing to the hatch above, "That will only slow them down for a minute. And troopers will come after us in the tunnels!" Without waiting for a response, he wriggles through a one-meter square opening, apparently a concealed access door, into a dimly lit, conduit and piped-lined corridor, as muffled blaster fire above is heating the access hatch red-hot.

The last PC down the tunnel may need medical attention, but he'll probably have to wait until the group is in a safer locale. However, if he requires immediate attention on the spot, the stormtroopers break through the hatch above just as the rebels are preparing to leave - and a running battle ensues through the winding service tunnels.

Encounter 2: Blasters Below

After roughly ten minutes of traversing the interconnected maze of tunnels, lead by the youth, the rebels round a corner and come face to face (10 meters) with a full squad of stormtroopers. Outnumbered and outgunned, the rebels should be scrambling back the way they came.

After four or five rounds of running combat (**Note:** Increase all Fire Combat Diff. numbers by +2 due to poor lighting. Only the lead two troopers and rear two rebels may fire in running combat), the rebels come to a T-intersection, where a narrower, even dimmer-lit tunnel branches off.

At this point, allow the lead two rebels to roll PER (10+ or the higher roll) to make out moving shadows ahead - the pursuing stormtroopers from the warehouse!

Allow the players a few seconds to think of firing on both squads to get them to fire on each other while the rebels escape down the narrow tunnel. If none think of it, a trooper from behind fires through the rebels, blasting a chunk of permacite out of the wall near the other troopers, who, of course, return fire. As ozone assaults their nostrils and blasted permacite dust reduces visibility to almost zero, the rebels escape down the side tunnel, surely pleased with this encounter's outcome. (You may optionally require the PCs to make Dodge rolls to avoid being hit in the crossfire.)

With the battle still raging behind them, the youth leads the PCs through the maze of tunnels to another concealed hatch in the tunnel wall and up a ladder that rises through the floor of a vehicle garage.

(If the rebels were delayed by the need of medical treatment, then they instead are engaged in a running battle with the troopers from the warehouse. When the rebels

WES ANKICHIA

Ht: 1.6 meters	Sex: Male	Age: 14
DEX 4D	**PER 2D+1**	
Dodge 4D+2	Hide/Sneak 2D+2	
KNO 3D	**STR 2D+2**	
MEC 3D	Climb/Jump 3D	
RepulsorOp 3D+2	**TEC 3D**	

Wes is the only offspring of an upper middle class widower. His father, Lenka, saw to it that his son was well educated, and more than just classrooms and compuboards. After the coming of the Imperials, Wes proved to be a valuable member in the partisan movement. Even after his father lost his position and wealth to the Empire, Wes maintained his youthful cheer and vigor. Now, with his father and most of his surviving fighting companions held prisoner and about to die, he is more dedicated than ever to the freedom of Linholm. But much of his youthful exuberance has been displaced, replaced by a hatred of the ugly spectre that is the Empire.

reach the T-intersection, they see the shadows of the trooper squad ahead. The encounter goes as above from this point.)

EPISODE TWO: PREPARATION

Summary

In this episode, the PCs get the whole story of what has happened to the underground and the rebel team, and realize they are the only hope of rescue. They travel to the only remaining supply cache, where they acquire rebel speeder bikes. On the way to the mine compound, they hide from a biker patrol and encounter a fierce jakora monster. After viewing the compound the PCs plan the rescue.

LINHOLM

Linholm boasts only one major city, Synia, which is the worlds capitol. Also located at Synia is the only starport and an Imperial garrison base. The planet's primary industry is mining, distantly followed by a rapidly developing light manufacturing industry.

It is unusual for the Empire to go as far as placing a garrison base on a world with a population of only 37 million people, but the Empire's mining interests on the planet were deemed important and vulnerable enough to do so. As is often the case on occupied planets with relatively low populations, the Imperials have been little concerned with peacefully pacifying the citizens of Linholm. As a result of their callous and often cruel handling of affairs involving locals, anti-Imperial sentiment is high, and underground support and activity has increased sharply.

The Planet

Linholm is the third planet of seven in the Mediraan star system, which lies in the same Rim sector as Tatooine. The planet is moderately dry and barren, and its surface is largely covered by rough, broken terrain. Linholm boasts few mountains, however, because of low tectonic activity, but the planet has exerienced a high frequency of volcanism in ages past. These eruptions were generally low pressure, oozing flows which created broad lava plains that cover thousands of square kilometers. But in certain regions where the underlying rock is strangely honeycombed, these oozing eruptions created groves of unique, fascinating natural pinnacles. Most are rough, pointed spires aiming at the stars, but many are mushroom shaped from lava that flowed out along what was long ago the surface, before erosion removed the soil and softer rock. Many of the mushroom flows converged to create series of awe-inspiring, multi-domed structures.

The Great Pinnacle Forest

The Great Pinnacle Forest is Linholm's largest region of lava pinnacles, and is thus named because the planet's flora, entirely made up of dense ground covers and low shrubbery, has seeded throughout much of the region. The porous nature of the pinnacles has allowed the wind to deposit enough soil in their surfaces to support the flora. This gives the pinnacles the appearance of great, towering growths, proudly revealed by their blue-green splendor. In an environment entirely devoid of trees, nature has provided a splendid substitute.

In the honeycombed foundations of the pinnacle forests lies the greater water tables of the planet's limited water resources. This explains the lush plant growth in these regions. Most of the world's native fauna can be found here as well. In the variety of animals that exist on Linholm, only one is truly a threat to the spacefaring races who come here. It is the fierce jakora monster.

Encounter 3: The Youth's Story

The PCs likely have already been asking many questions, to which the youth should have ignored or responded with, "When we are safe I'll answer your questions." That time has come. Read aloud the text below.

"My name is Wes Ankichia," the youth states proudly. "My father is Lenka Ankichia, the chief organizer and commander of the Linholm Freedom Movement." Wes's proud bearing quickly falters as he continues. "You want to know what happened. I will tell you. The Movement was betrayed by one of my father's trusted lieutenants. When the raids and arrests began, my father quickly determined who had betrayed him. In a struggle, he killed the traitor with his bare hands. But it was too late. The Imperials knew almost everything. They knew who we were and where our safe houses were. Our people tried to fight them, but we had too few weapons and were not prepared. Most of the partisans who weren't killed were arrested and taken to the Drakinna mine compound, including my father and all surviving Alliance advisors, all of whom will be dead before long in Drakinna's nightmarish slave mine." The boy's sorrowful demeanor suddenly changes to one of excitement. "But now you have come! You can give us new hope! Please, you must help me to rescue them! Then this war can still be won. You can see how the people reacted to the arrests. With the leadership of the freed partisans and the weapons you have brought us, our people will rise up and destroy the Imperial dogs! But we must act soon or it will be too late for my father and the captured rebels!"

The PCs probably have many more questions. When asked about the service tunnels, Wes tells them that the Movement built secret, concealed entrances to them from buildings owned by or accessible to faithful partisans. When the Imperials realized that the tunnels were being used, they patrolled them heavily, effectively making them useless. But Wes knew the PCs were coming, and knew the warehouse was being watched, and so risked the tunnels.

When questioned about the Drakinna mine compound, Wes responds as below.

"Come, I will show you," Wes declares, waving toward the only vehicle in the garage, a well used land cruiser capable of seating ten occupants. "The partisan who provided this garage managed a mine not far from the Great Pinnacles. Close to his mine is the only supply cache the Imperials didn't sieze. It was only recently set up for raiding Imperial holdings and the Drakinna mine, and the traitor wasn't yet aware of it. We'll go there first, then to the mine. We'll need the speeder bikes that are there to pass through the pinnacles, as we surely can't use the cleared access way through the forest to the mine without being spotted."

The cruiser is obviously used as transport for miners, and is quite dirty inside and out, with many minor dents and paint scrapes. Inside are several soiled pairs of coveralls, some tools in belt pouches, and ten breath masks.

Encounter 4: The Last Cache

After leaving the subdued city and travelling 80 km across rough, broken terrain, Wes directs the cruiser up a rocky outcropping that rises from the very edge of the Great Pinnacle Forest, then drops the cruiser into a small, steep-sided depression amid a tumble of boulders. When everyone is out, he removes a camoflauge netting from behind a boulder and throws it over the cruiser, then leads the PCs along a cleverly concealed trail. When he reaches a smooth rock face that is well concealed by surrounding rock, he stops and parts a camoflauge curtain that hides a shallow cave behind it - the last supply cache.

Inside are four heavily modified, two-place speeder bikes, which were only recently provided by the Alliance for raiding and reconaissance. Other gear and supplies includes a medium fusion power generator for charging the bikes, one vehicle tool kit, four 25 meter lengths of syntherope, ten flares, eight sleeping bags, four glow rods, forty person-days of rations, one pair of macrobinoculars, twelve medpacs, four protective helmets and vests (disbanded planetary militia issue), four pair of infra-red goggles, two commlinks, two blaster rifles, four hunting blasters, three blaster pistols, a case of twelve grenades, a case of four thermal detonators, and two biker scout armored suits, both with patched blaster holes in the chest pieces (the blast holes aren't visible beyond ten meters).

DRAKINNA AND THE EMPIRE

Karth Drakinna is an unscroupulously greedy Twi'lek who left his home planet of Ryloth as a slave - sold to slavers by his own kind. With a knack for taking care of himself, he was soon an officer on a pirate ship. After earning his freedom in a death duel, Drakinna applied his talents to private enterprise, though his business practices are hardly honest or ethical. Drakinna now owns and operates a mine on Linholm, mining rich ore deposits containing valuable rare elements.

Drakinna saw the coming of the Empire to Linholm as an opportunity to further satisfy his greedy desires. Knowing of the Empire's high demand for rare elements for the construction of high-tech systems, and also knowing that an Imperial occupation creates, to the Imperials' thinking, a great number of unwanted resistors, Drakinna proposed to sell his ore deposits to the Empire at cut-rate prices if they would turn over to him as slaves those pertetraitors charged with crimes against the Empire.

Sadly, this deal has resulted in a great many deaths of Linholm citizens as Drakinna operates outside uniform safety standards and procedures, which are usually enforced by the Empire. In this particular case, an obvious exception has been arranged.

Sadder still is the fact that known partisan officers previously arrested died unpleasant deaths within hours of entering Drakinna's mine. It is suspected that Imperial authorities have arranged for Drakinna to serve as a convenient executioner of the Empire's greater enemies on Linholm.

Encounter 5: Monster Of The Pinnacles

The PCs will probably want to look the mine compound over before making a rescue plan. However, now knowing what gear is available to them, they may wish to develop a plan while at the cache, as Wes can describe in detail the mine and surrounding environment - and he has a bonus. He is one of the few people other than Drakinna who is aware of a small cave entrance at the rear of the mine. Wes has watched enough times to know that there are always two guards at the cave entrance.

In any case, the rebels mount up on the speeder bikes and speed into the pinnacle forest, winding their way through the towering maze, directed by Wes's compass (if a PC has a compass, then Wes does not).

When the rebels are 20 km into the forest, have the PCs roll PER. Tell the player with the highest roll that he spies speeder bikes moving through the pinnacles 100 meters off to one side. The PCs quickly recognize the four bikers as Imperial scouts. Though they don't appear to have seen the rebels, their course is rapidly bringing them closer.

The PCs should declare that they are ducking behind a large pinnacle or are otherwise concealing themselves. The scouts whiz past them, unaware of the rebels' presence. But before the rebels can continue their journey, a part of the greenery suddenly separates from a nearby pinnacle and launches itself at the crew of one of the speeder bikes, knocking them to the cushioned forest floor.

The assailant is a jakora monster. The jakora presses the attack fearlessly, but, as soon as it is wounded, it attempts to flee.

JAKORA MONSTER

DEX 4D **STR** 3D+2
PER 2D **Speed Code:** 4D
Size: Adults average 1.4m tall at the shoulder.
Combat: Jakoras are fierce, cat-like pouncing carnivores who prefer to wait in ambush for their prey, which is any of the rodent-like species that inhabit the pinnacle forests, but has also come to include offworlders, though these beasts usually retreat if wounded. Their blue-green, rough, scaly hide blends into the local foliage, making them difficult to detect. They are capable of high speed, but only for a short duration.

Encounter 6: A Compound View

With the jakora seen to, the rebels travel the remaining 15 kilometers to the edge of the forest. Only a kilometer distant is the mine (refer to map and description to describe what the PCs see.).

As they gaze upon the scene from the cover of the pinnacles, they faintly hear, off in the distance, the telltale whine of particle accelerator thrusters on TIE fighters as two dark specs streak across the sky high above them. And in front of them, an awkwardly slow ore lighter rises from the mine compound and flies low over the pinnacles on its short journey to the Imperial berths at the port.

The PCs must now make or finalize their plans for the freeing of the partisans and rebels, using what gear and

weapons they have acquired. Wes has no ideas, except the use of the cave entrance at the rear of the mine, and he will follow whatever plan is devised.

EPISODE THREE: THE RESCUE

Summary

In this episode, the PCs free the prisoners through a plan of their own devising, aided by the prisoners. As the partisans board all available vehicles, Lenka presses them to get to the port to distribute the guns. But the PCs are assaulted by biker scouts and a chase ensues.

Encounter 7: Carrying Out The Plan

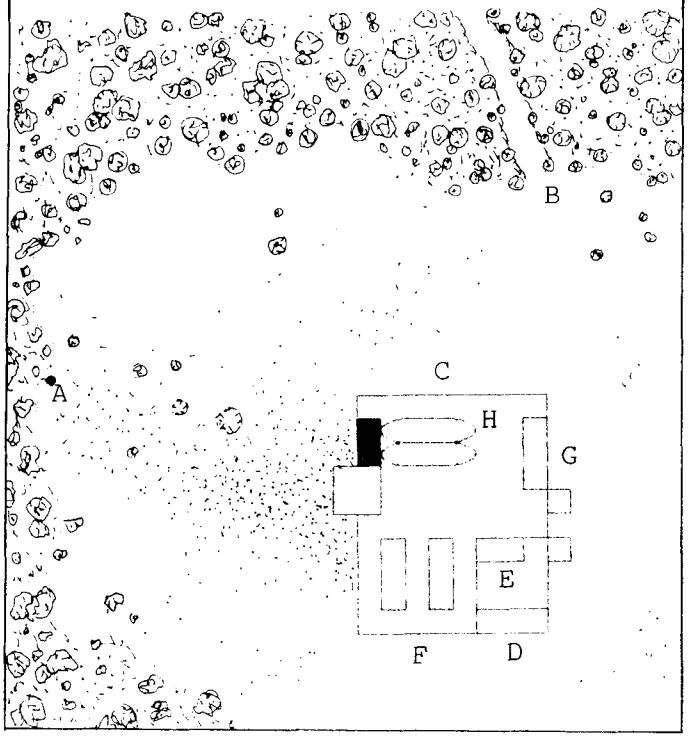
The rebels attempt the rescue as they have planned it. The Gamemaster must respond to their actions as necessary, determining Difficulty numbers as needed. If the cave is used, Climb/Jump skill should be applied, as the cave floor is not level. Remember that there are two guards at the cave entrance.

The mine is operated around the clock, and a crew is always working. Sentries and task foremen, all armed, oversee the miners.

THE MINE COMPOUND

Incarcerated in the compound are over 400 prisoners. Drakinna has 50 armed thugs of poor to fair combat ability, plus a squad of 10 stormtroopers provided by the Empire. The entrance guard towers have mounted medium repeat blasters. The fence perimeter is patrolled by sentry squads of four men each.

Legend: A. cave entrance. B. cleared access. C. 4meter high wire fence. D. troop garrison barracks. E. administration. F. prison barracks. G. vehicle garage. H. ore lighters



While the PCs will likely have surprise, freeing the partisans should not be an easy task. In fact, in the interest of maintaining suspense, it is suggested that events transpire so that the success of the operation be in doubt. But as soon as it becomes evident that a rescue is in process, the prisoners rise up against their ruthless task masters, and the entire compound is suddenly transformed into a bloody battle zone as Drakinna's thugs are rapidly overcome. The greatest resistance comes from Drakinna and the stormtrooper squad that is assigned to assist him. But even they are quickly dispatched.

Read aloud the paragraph below.

Buzzing with excitement and armed with what weapons they have siezed, the partisans scramble aboard all available vehicles, including a couple of ore lighters, displaying a fervent desire for vengeance. A gray-haired, soiled man emerges from the crowd and briskly approaches. "I am Lenka Antichia. We are in your debt," he declares joyfully, clasping each of their hands and embracing his son affectionately. His face becomes more sullen as he continues. "I am sorry. The Alliance advisors are already . . . no more. But we can avenge their deaths! We must move quickly, while the Imperials are caught off guard. You must get to your ship and begin distributing the weapons. The battle for freedom has begun!"

Encounter 8: A Speeder Chase

The PCs quickly get to their bikes and speed off toward the port, but only get a few kilometers into the forest when they are attacked by four Imperial biker scouts. Read aloud the text below.

The steady hum of the speeder bikes is abruptly pierced by the sharp sound of laser cannon fire as laser bolts superheat the air only fractions of a meter from the lead rebel bike, speeding on to sear the greenery ahead of you to black. Looking back, you see four Imperial biker scouts weaving out of the pinnacles in high speed pursuit.

As Gamemaster, you should make this encounter lively and exciting - and fast paced. If the PCs are using the access way, you may have to convince them to fly into the pinnacles. Perhaps the scouts are repeatedly hitting dangerously close to the rebels, or are actually blasting off minor parts. Maybe an AT-AT walker is standing in the access way some distance ahead and is already blasting away, its near-misses showering the rebels with rocky debris!

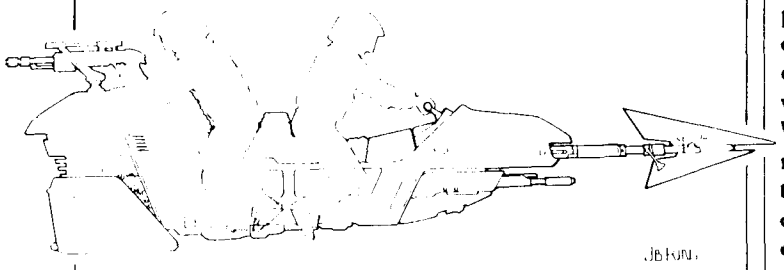
After they are into the pinnacles, every round should require a Repulsorlift Op skill roll to safely maneuver, which of course makes Heavy Weapons skill rolls more difficult when firing the bikes' mounted blasters. Repulsorlift Op Difficulty numbers for maneuvering should reflect the speed being attempted.

When and if any rebel bikes go down, a scout will turn back to finish the rebels off. This way, if some of the PCs crash, the battle isn't over for them yet. Of course, it is possible that all the rebel bikes could be destroyed. In this

MODIFIED REBEL SPEEDER BIKE

Craft: Incom Sky Arrow
Crew: 2 (1 gunner)
Cargo Cap: 4 kg
Speed Code: [3D]
Maneuver: [3D]
Body Strength: [2D]
Flight Ceiling: 10 meters

Weapons:
Forward Laser Cannon
Fire Con: [2D]
Damage: [2D+2]
Rear Swivel Cannon
Fire Con: [1D]
Damage: [2D]



case, they'll be picked up by an already overloaded land cruiser headed back to the city - but the PCs have to ride on the outside.

EPISODE FOUR: THE FINAL BATTLE

Summary

In this final episode, the PCs return to Synia to find it the site of a desperate battle. The very destruction of the Imperial garrison is at stake, but two TIEs protect the base from explosive-laden ore lighters. The PCs must shoot down the TIEs before the base can be destroyed.

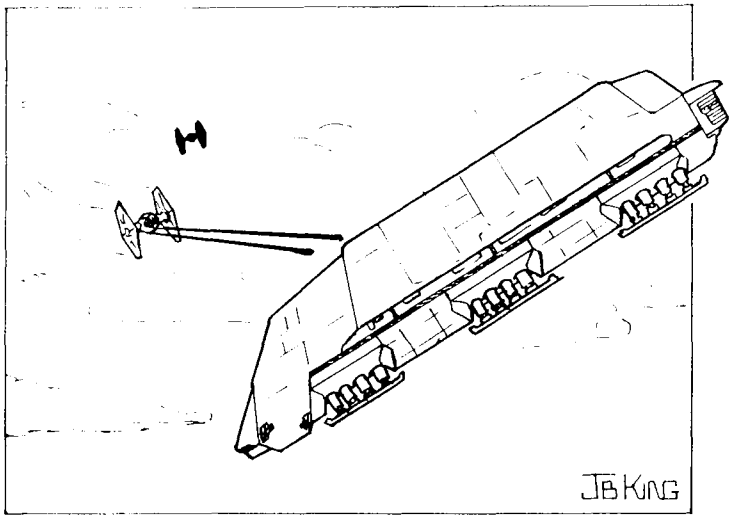
Encounter 9: A Battle In Progress

As the PCs approach Synia they see black, billowing smoke plumes rising from the city. Soon, they hear the harsh sounds of battle. When they enter the city they see the Imperials have done poorly. The blasted corpses of stormtrooper patrols ly in the streets or scattered around burned out cruisers. The faint sounds of blaster fire indicate that skirmishes continue. Periodically they come across AT-STs, twisted and blackened, destroyed by collisions with land cruisers. They even find a smashed and toppled AT-AT, its twisted steel lying with that of the ore lighter used to bring it down. Both rest in the smoking rubble of a collapsed apartment building. Unfortunately, the city and its citizens have suffered many casualties as well.

As the rebels approach near the port, they come within view of the garrison base located two km beyond the city perimeter. Here is where the major fighting is now taking place. The base has taken serious damage from explosive-laden ore lighters. The heavy blast doors are blocked by the wreckage of one such vessel, most of the turrets are knocked out, and the fighter launch chutes are out. But there are two TIEs airborne, and, as the PCs watch, they swoop out of the sky with lasers blasting away at a diving ore lighter. Seconds later, the lighter explodes in a superheated fireball as its detonite cargo ignites. Debris rains down on the garrison base and compound, but no damage is done.

Read aloud the paragraph below.

A partisan officer you recognize from the mine hails you as he rapidly approaches. "We have barely enough detonite remaining to load two more ore lighters.We have at least that many lighters that can be remote controlled, but they'll never get past those fighters! If we wait until their fuel is depleted, the Imperials could repair the launch chutes - and we'd have more TIEs in the sky than we could ever handle and the battle would be lost. We've *got* to shoot down those TIEs, but we have no skilled pilots." The lieutenant glares at the base, then looks quisically at you. "There are four operative Z-95s from the disbanded militia warehoused at the port. Can you fly them?"



Encounter 10: Headhunters Up

The officer leads the PCs to the right warehouse. The Z-95s are in fair condition, but they are stock and have no updated modifications. All have operative ejection seats, which will be necessary to a PC's survival if he loses control of his craft due to combat damage.

Within minutes, a hastily organized ground crew has the fighters ready, and the PCs are given the launch signal. Within seconds, the PC's are involved in deadly combat.

When the rebel pilots have downed the TIEs (cheat if you have to), two ore lighters lift lazily from nearby port berths, rise several hundred meters into the sky, then plummet down at high speed, plunging deep into the Imperial base. Within seconds, massive explosions shake the ground as a mighty roar assaults all ears. The walls of the base are rent and shattered by continuing explosions. Black, billowing smoke soon hides the scene of destruction, but the harsh sounds continue. Soon, even this is drowned out by the victorious cheers of many thousands of free citizens of Linholm. . . . for now, the planet is free. But to stay free, many more rebel victories must follow. May the Force be with the Rebel Alliance.●

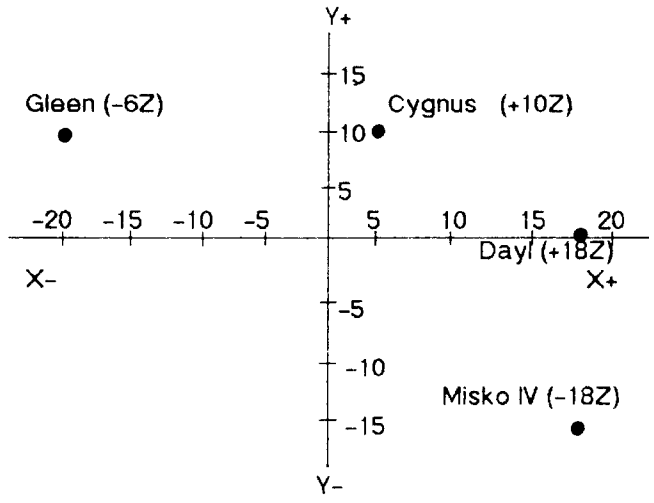
THREE-DIMENSIONAL STAR MAPS

A computer program to determine 3-D distance calculations

by Glen Allison

Stars do not exist on a flat plane, such as they are shown on a paper map, but rather are fixed in three-dimensional space. Some game systems, such as *Space Master* by I.C.E., use X, Y, and Z coordinates to simulate the 3-D location of star systems. If a referee wants to do this but a particular game system does not include XYZ coordinates, it is easy to modify a map to allow for this mapping system by placing stars on a grid map (probably using graph paper) and then including a Z coordinate (minus for below the paper map and plus for above the map) as shown below.

The short computer program included in this article will perform the calculations necessary to determine Light Years (LY) between star systems. The program is written in Applesoft Basic for the II-E and II-GS. With a few minor changes, it can be made to run on most computer systems.



SYSTEM	X	Y	Z
Cygnus	+5	+10	+10
Dayl	+18	+0	+18
Gleen	-20	+10	-6
Misko IV	+18	-15	-18

CREATING THE PROGRAM

```
10  HOME
20  PRINT "ASTROGATION PROGRAM
25  PRINT "Glen Allison 1987"
30  PRINT
40  PRINT "1)  DISTANCE
50  PRINT "2)  STAR CHARTS
53  PRINT "3)  END PROGRAM
55  INPUT A
60  IF A = 1 THEN  GOTO 100
70  IF A = 2 THEN  HOME : PRINT "NO ACCESS!"
80  IF A = 3 THEN  HOME : END
90  END
100  HOME
110  PRINT "DISTANCE CALCULATION"
120  INPUT "NAME OF FIRST PLANET    " ;FP$
130  PRINT "COORDINATES?"
140  INPUT "INPUT  X" ;X1
150  INPUT "INPUT  Y" ;Y1
160  INPUT "INPUT  Z" ;Z1
170  INPUT "NAME OF SECOND PLANET    " ;SP$
180  INPUT "INPUT  X" ;X2
190  INPUT "INPUT  Y" ;Y2
200  INPUT "INPUT  Z" ;Z2
210  HOME
230  QW = SQR  (((X1 - X2) * (X1 - X2)) +
     ((Y1 - Y2) * (Y1 - Y2)) + ((Z1 - Z2) * (Z1 - Z2)))
235  PRINT  FP$" TO "SP$" IS:  "QW" LIGHT YEARS."
240  PRINT  CHR$  (4) ;"PR#1"
245  LET ESC$ = CHR$ (27)
250  PRINT  FP$" TO "SP$" IS: "QW" LIGHT YEARS."
260  PRINT ESC$ ;"E"
265  PRINT CHR$  (4) ;"PR#0"
267  INPUT SD$
270  GOTO  10
```

In the program, lines 10-53 create the menu; lines 55-100 begin or end the program and lines 110-200 input the data. Line 220 performs the calculation and lines 230-270 provide the printer codes for Apple printers.

To convert this program to IBM: 1) Change lines 10, 100 and 210 to CLS, 2) Delete lines 230, 240, 260 and 270, 3) In line 250, change PRINT to LPRINT. These changes should allow the program to run on IBM PCs. ●

FLIP OF A COIN

Reviewing a fan publication devoted to the characters of Harrison Ford

Review by James B. King
Illustrations by Cherie Fontyn from Flip Of A Coin 12





A film industry reviewer, after viewing "Raiders Of The Lost Ark", once stated that Harrison Ford could become the Bogart of the 80s. Regardless of whether or not that statement has become fact (doubtless there are many who would say it has), Harrison Ford has earned a great fan following. And with any fan following comes fan publications.

Flip Of A Coin is one such amateur publication, devoted solely to the various characters portrayed by Harrison Ford throughout his career, written and illustrated by fan supporters. Among those characters, Han Solo, as well as the rest of his notorious rebel companions, is well represented here.

It has been my experience that the word "amateur" often indicates a lesser quality product. But I was pleased to discover that this is not the case here. The quality of writing and illustration in Flip Of A Coin 12, the issue I viewed, ranges from fair to excellent - which is certainly as good as some more professional works. Illustration is moderately sprinkled throughout the book, with roughly one illustration per seven pages, though most are full-page, and many are half-tones. All in all, I was pleasantly entertained by the book's contents. Harrison Ford has many talented fans.

If the book lacks anywhere, it is in page graphics. Text is typewriter set, single column, with a ragged right margin, though title/author headings are in larger stylized lettering. Of course, and admittedly, this is getting picky, especially where it concerns an amateur publication. The binding, however, is perfect bound (glued) and the cover for FLIP 12, though printed one color, sports two excellent close-up drawings of Harrison Ford. And inside the cover is a whopping 300 pages! As a fan project, the publishers are doing a fine job.

If you are a fan of Harrison Ford, or at least enjoy the characters he has portrayed, then perhaps you should check into Flip Of A Coin. If your interest is primarily science-fiction, remember, Han Solo is not the only sf character Ford has portrayed. ●

If you are interested in Flip Of A Coin, send your query to the address below. Remember to include a SASE.

FLIP OF A COIN
Paula Truelove and Jenny McAdams, Editors
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PETERSBURG

A work of fiction set in the shattered Imperium of *MegaTraveller*

by Jerry Campbell

The streaks flaming the night sky could only be from something man-caused. Meteors almost always burn for only a short while, at least above the world known as Yavanna. But many of tonight's meteors were continuing their firey decent long after their plunge into the atmosphere, turning the evening sky into a fireworks display of silver and cyan fire; meteor trails raining down to mingle with exhaust plumes from ground-based missiles rising to render the decending stones too small to cause major harm. Higher up, actinic ruby lances of mining lasers, striving to dissect or divert the largest asteroids, pulsed in a light show all their own. All this was punctuated by the occasional sun-bright flare off on the horizon of a meteor's impact after slipping past the over-loaded tracking network.

Features bathed in the amber and phosphor-green glow cast by multiple screens before her, Toni McManus concentrated intently on their displays. The remaining tracking systems, both surface and orbital, relayed more accurate, if less picturesque data of the events overhead. For most of the day, she and a handful of others from Yavanna's System Defense Arm had front row seats for the near elimination of their homeworld's meager defenses. Thinking back, she saw how obvious the attacker's moves had been. They'd certainly left enough clues.

Weeks before, satellites had reported the approach of several asteroids from the outer of two asteroid belts within the Yavannan System. The orbital traffic computer noted that the "brands", as the Nav/Ownership beacons required on all asteroids being mined or moved are called, belonged to a belter known to be working in the general vicinity of their path. Attempts to contact him had failed. That wasn't necessarily cause for alarm, however, as belters often had systems failures and were usually more than adequately equipped to handle most emergencies. And sometimes, they just simply didn't want to be disturbed.

"Here's two for you, Greg," Toni whispered. With sharp, angry jabs she punched in commands for her own two defensive missiles to lock on and fire on inbound meteors. Tears of grief and rage that clouded her vision were brushed impatiently away as she concentrated on her task. Still, it was nearly impossible to keep the memories from seeping into her mind, memories that fanned the heat of her burning desire for revenge. Any kind of revenge for the loss she now felt.

While events had perhaps seemed a bit unusual, they weren't more so than anything else since the rebellion's chaos had touched this system. If only most of the large craft hadn't been taken by the various "navies" that had passed through, usually out to war upon one that had come by earlier. The essential chores of space policing and rescue had befallen the System Defense Arm's two old, retired 50ton cutters, hurriedly reactivated and refitted for the job. That unaccompanied string, or "packet" of asteroids was warranted iimportant enough to tie up one of the relics with an investigation. . .

• • •

"Hey, Steph," shouted Cmdr. G. Westcott, captain and pilot of the Yavannan Patrol Craft *Feanor*, over the boat's intercom. "Can't you coax any more power out of this heap? I'd like to get this packet of rocks ID'd before next week!"

"Look, Gregor," the voice of Stephane Izumi shot back. "I'm an engineer, not a wizard, alright? If you'd do like I ask and convince Operations to give us two weeks and the upgrade parts I need, you'd get your extra power and then some. As it is, I'm doing good just to keep her from overheating! Keep your pants on, sport. That hot date with your fiance will wait!"

"Nothing worse than a cocky fusion monkey,"Wescott muttered to no one in particular. The engineer's laughter briefly spilled from the intercom as, with a swipe of his hand, he broke the connection. Turning to his co-pilot/comm officer, he said, "You suppose you could put that holocube down long enough to give me a scan on the packet? Where'd you get that, anyway? Last I heard, those are all imports and not cheap."

"If Steph hears you call her a monkey, she just might decide you're ideal for reaction mass - and it's none of your business where I got the cube," Ens. Roget Clock retorted with a chuckle. "As for the scan you want, oh impatient and cranky one . . ."

"Great, another clown on board!"

". . . I show twenty-six large metallic objects, massing from twenty to one-twenty-four kilotonnes. With one exception, all have albedo and shape irregularity consistent with ore-pocket grade asteroids. Orbital projection of the packet shows interception with Yavanna to be eighty-nine percent probability."

"How's that, again? Tyrone's never cut his deliveries that close before."

"Well, maybe he bought the farm before making final transfer orbit adjustments. That exception I show appears to be a probable man-made body, traveling along with and behind one of the larger rocks. I'm not picking up any powser readouts though. Maybe it's a hunk of some derelict Tyrone found. If we can get around and closer, I'll have a better make on it for you."

"Okay, call in to Dispatch and tell them we're going to need the tugs out here. I think these pebbles are too big for us to try and move . . ."

"That's no lie!"

". . . AND, that we're going to close in to investigate an anomaly. Leave it at that. If that's really a derelict," Westcott rubbed a thumb and forefinger together in the universal sign for "cash" as he spoke, "then I don't want anyone cheating us out of a possible finder's fee."

"Roger that, boss!" Clock replied. "Yavanna Dispatch, this is YPC *Feanor* reporting in. . .

Manpower shortages were such that everyone on board wore two or more "hats". Thus, the co-pilot had to turn away from his scanner console to work the comm. Had it been otherwise, he might have detected the beam of the targeting radar powering up and locking on the *Feanor*. Finishing his transmission, he glanced at his scanning board while reporting: "Dispatch acknowledges and Toni says to tell you-what-the-hell-I?

"She said what?" a startled Gregor began. At the same moment, alarms began shrieking throughout *Feanor's* bridge. "Clock, report!" he shouted, while reflexively locking his helmet faceplate closed.

"I show targeting radars locked on us and three missiles inbound!" shouted Clock as his hands flew over his console. "At least one of those rocks is a ship, well camoflauged. Also, probable escorts in very tight formation with it, close enough to appear as one body. The missiles have a positive lock on us. Initiating ECM, but I don't think it'll do any good, they're too close."

"Gunnery, weapons are free!" Westcott exclaimed. "Engage inbounds! All hands, Red Alert! This is no drill! Steph, I need every erg you can give me and I need them now! Rog, recontact Dispatch and let them know what's going on here."

Over sixty years old and badly in need of refit, *Feanor* could still achieve a 5-G acceleration. She could turn tighter than any interstellar ship, but not as tight as a Mk.II missile, even one traveling at fifty-plus Gs.

As the missiles streaked across the gap between the two craft, *Feanor's* lasers lanced out to bag one with a head-on shot. The ECM managed to divert another into a packet asteroid. But the third missile would not be denied its programmed destiny. Ens. Clock had

only just began his distress call when it detonated on the boat's dorsal hull, almost exactly amidship. The blast of the impacting warhead tore away the weapons turret, flinging it forward and down through the forward hull and the top of the bridge.

The ensign never finished his transmission. Both he and a large section of his console were smashed by the hurtling mass of the turret before he and it careened off into space. Only the fact that Cmdr. Westcott was strapped in kept him from following the now lifeless gunner and his turret, for everything not secured was dragged along as the atmosphere rushed out the gaping hole.

As the detonation forced the turret through the forward hull, it also ruptured a wall of the fuel tankage behind the the Weapons Section bulkhead. As eighty-one cubic meters of liquid hydrogen vented through the rupture, it combusted from the heat of the detonated warhead. The dorsal hull plates, unable to withstand the stress, flowered back in response to the pressure exerted form within, glowing molten along the edges in the searing heat of the flaring hydrogen. The passageway running from Weapons to Engineering, barely more than one meter wide by two high, collapsed in on itself under the intense overpressure and heat.



In a glaring nova lasting only seconds, the flare blossomed, spent itself and subsided. The *Feanor* was all but severed in two, rendered helpless and tumbling towards eternity. Her drive tubes were hushed, yet still glowed with heat from the thrust that had been thundering from them only seconds before. The now gaping center of the boat showed only scorched and melted metal, flash welded hatches, and an occasional spark from discharging electrical systems.

Stillness returned to the area surrounding the asteroids as the attacker, with no lights visible, continued its silent journey toward the unsuspecting world of Yavanna.

". . . *Feanor*, come in YPC *Feanor*, please respond." The young comm tech turned to the defense commander behind him and said, "Still no response, sir. They simply ceased transmitting after that hailing call."

"Is it possible their commo malfed?" inquired the DC. "As I recall, Izumi had been hollering about wanting to do a general systems rework."

"Possible, sir," replied the tech, "but unlikely. The electronics were gone over just before she lifted. Those, if nothing else, would be to spec. Uh, no discredit to Lt. Izumi intended, sir."

"Yes yes, I'm sure there wasn't," replied the DC. "What's the status of the *Gandalf*, and how soon can she be on station at *Feanor's* location to investigate?"

"Given her last reported location and course, and with their meson commo gear down as it is, it'll take sixty-seven minutes each way to contact her, assuming solar static distortion doesn't wreak havoc with the signal and, say, four days, if they push it, to get there, sir."

"Fine. Relay my compliments to Commander Hayes and order him to divert course with all haste toward *Feanor's* last location. By the way," the commander's brow furrowed. "What's the ETA on that packet Commander Westcott reported?"

"Twelve-hundred hours at present course and rate until the lead rock is one planetary diameter out, sir."

"Alright, get as many work tugs as we have to put all else on hold. I want those asteroids diverted before word gets out and a civil panic starts. Shire Metals has six or seven tugs of their own so, since they're the main buyer for asteroids the belters bring in, they can damn sure help move this packet. That, or I'll make sure they never get their operations license renewed."

"Yes, sir. Ahh, wait one, commander. I have traffic coming in from the Nearbelt."

Shortly, a voice crackled over the room's speakers. It was hazy with static, but discernable: ". . . anna, this is Burro Boat *Li'l Mule*', Dickson Kahn, operator, transmitting on tight band. I've just witnessed what I believe must've been an attack on the *Feanor*. Picked up some strange signals, like a targeting feeder and, shortly afterward, witnessed a hydrogen flare. Whatever's left of *Feanor* passed near me just a bit ago. I'll attempt to intercept and rescue any survivors after Tyrone's packet has passed. Don't count on much, though. Looks like she blew all to hell when she went. Yavanna, this is Burro Boat *Li'l Mule*, Dickson . . ."

"Okay, mister, turn off the speaker. I think I got the message," said the DC softly. "Don't reply to the *Mule*. I don't want to needlessly endanger him if there's really hostiles running with that packet."

In the stunned silence that filled the room, weapons tech McManus found herself speaking up. "Commander," she asked, "if there are inbound hostiles, just how are we supposed to stop them? At the risk of being out of line, sir, all our ground defense missiles and tracking systems aer only good for slow, steady targets. Rough asteroids from packets and the like. Anything with any real maneuverability can simply side-step whatever we throw. And all that's left of our orbital systems are just sensors and relays, thanks to everybody and their uncle grabbing them 'for the good of the fleet' or whatever. We've basically got our butts hanging out, waiting for anyone with a paddle to whack us a good one!"

With that she drew a breath and then noticed the shocked silence of the other techs around her. The DC's face bore a jumbled, mixed expression of one amused, worried, and affronted, all at the same time. His voice, however, was level when he replied. "Well, I guess that about sums up our situation. So, technician, ahh, what's your name?"

"McManus, sir," she sheepishly answered as an embarrassed blush colored her face. "Toni McManus, Weapons Computer Tech, Second Class."

Alright, Technician McManus," the DC said, smiling. "You've apparently given this a bit of thought. So, how might we turn this situation around to our favor?"

"Petersburg, sir."

"Come again, technician?" the DC growled.

"Petersburg, the battle of!" replied Toni. "Ancient Terran history, sir." The increasing glare from her superior caused her to hasten with a further explanation. "During one of the wars on pre-interstellar Terra, a general, badly outnumbered and outgunned, held a far superior force at bay by having dummy artillery constructed from painted logs. These he placed behind walls, with only the ends showing, and had them 'manned'."

"I think I understand what you're driving at. He used decoys. But tell me, did he win?"

"Uh, no, sir." Toni hurried on. "But not through any real fault of his own. The supplies and reinforcements he'd hoped for never

arrived in sufficient quantity to where he could launch an offensive. The other army simply waited, grew, and eventually carried the city."

"So how is all this supposed to help us run off these possible raiders, and any others that are sure to follow?" inquired one of the techs that had gathered to listen.

"Look, I never said our situations were identical," McManus exclaimed. "Only similar. Who can wait cozy in this system longer? Us on a living planet, with both industries and agricultural support at hand, or some pirates in a ship? The Petersburg defenders, like our 'visitors' now, lacked bodies, supplies, and food. We don't. They had decoys galore. We don't, but can!"

"Okay, Toni," said the DC, forgetting his usual formality in his growing enthusiasm. "I suppose you've an idea or two for these decoys?"

"Certainly, sir! But first, recall the tugs and the *Gandalf*."

• • •

The pair of missiles flared skyward from their silos to shatter a couple of large fragments decending on the populace of Yavanna. While her launchers went into their reload cycle, her radars swept the sky for new targets. Toni this had a few moments free.

She leaned back and, taking a sip from the now cold cup of tea beside her, finally allowed herself the luxury of reflecting on what had transpired after her conversation with the DC. Had it been only a few weeks prior? . . .

• • •

After three days deliberation, a new record for Yavanna's Congress, funding was approved to purchase the materials for what had begun to be called "Operation Petersburg". The predominant industry of the planet, after asteroid mining, had long been state-of-the-art electronics, with manufacturers encompassing the globe. These sources of electronic equipment, both military and civilian, were hard pressed, as the necessary items were located or produced, and assembly shops geared up over night to begin around-the-clock operations. Thousands of transmitters were assembled and tuned to broadcast on the wavelengths used by various weapons and targeting systems known to be employed by warships, defensive sats, and the like.

While downside plants labored to meet the demand for transmitters, nightmares were created for orbital traffic controllers. The orbital refineries and factories of Shire Metals and others were aswarm with activity as they rolled out kilometers of aluminized plastic and bracework. The recalled *Gandalf* and those tugs not actively engaged were put in a parking orbit with Yavanna between them and the approaching packet. They were then decended upon by spacesuited workers, who, working from hastily devised, computer generated plans, glued, bolted, and welded the braceworks onto the hulls of the various craft. Following closely behind, other figures clamored about the framing, cementing pre-cut panels of mylar, painting "ports", "hatches", and "drive tubes". Lights and transmitters were installed as they became available. Through the efforts of these workers and thousands of others, all working in concert, Yavanna's "fleet" sprang up almost overnight.

Meanwhile, camoflauged with semi-radar reflective black paint, their hull outlines distorted by the artful use of detachable blisters, the brigands drifted within the packet of asteroids, still concealed to all but the closest scrutiny. Had it not been for the *Li'l Mule's* warning broadcast, the defenses of Yavanna, such as they were, would have been as surely deceived as *Feanor* had been.

• • •

Memory of the stricken vessel brought Toni out of her reverie and her attention back to the lights on her status board, patiently flashing "Launch Ready" for the weapons under her direction. The dim interior lighting of the bunker, as well as the fresh tears that blurred her vision, prevented her becoming aware of the shadow falling over the console from behind. Clearing her eyes, part of her settled into the task of shooting, while another part recalled the more recent past . . .

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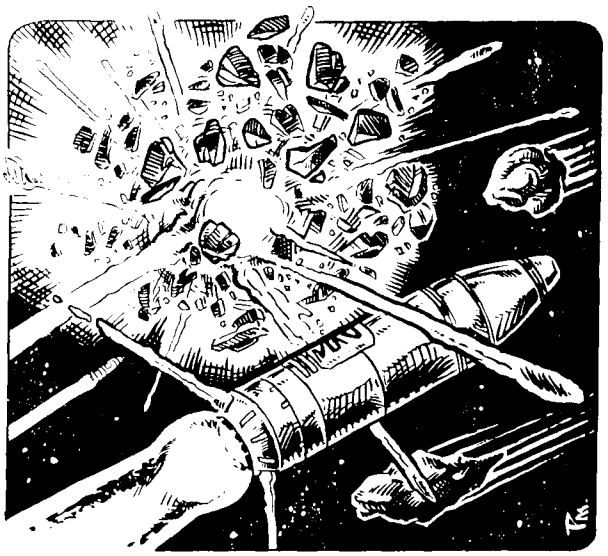
When the packet had approached to within three planetary diameters, the assembled decoys were gently maneuvered out and around from behind Yavanna to take up stations in full view of the oncoming menace. Signal generators and transmitters, lights and other devices filled the void with all the glare and noise one would expect from a battle group size collection of ships.

Tension mounted in the "Video Arcade", as the System Defense Operations bunker was now often referred to. Soon, they'd find out if all the effort of the past weeks had been worth it.

Silence permiated the bunker, broken only by the hum of a cooling fan or the occasional hushed voice of a communications operator. Hands lingered on tracking control balls, maintaining aiming "crosshairs" on screens over pre-selected targets. Others impatiently stroked recently sprouted beards or otherwise fidgeted quietly, awaiting orders to engage.

"I now know," spoke the defense commander, "just how that Confederate general at Petersburg felt, wondering if the ruse he'd prepared would really work, and for how long." Noticing the people he'd startled with his silence-shattering words, the DC's tired face flushed. With a grin and a quiet chuckle that was replied by many, he turned his attention back to his command console. With the atmosphere of tension momentarily lightened, the others on the bunker returned to their tasks as well.

The leader of the brigand ships was a cool one, or, perhaps, he simply didn't believe his sensors. The sudden appearance of a fleet from out of nowhere would create doubts in most any



commander. He allowed his vessels to close to within less than two diameters, maintaining strict emissions and communications control all the while, before signaling a retreat and lighting a torch for outsystem. Even that didn't occur until the missile defensives began to engage the packet asteroids.

Signals from the "fleet", calling on the brigands to surrender and stand by for boarding were answered with a flurry of missiles, which created a great deal of panic among the Yavannans who were wholly untrained for an actual combat engagement. Most of the missiles simply passed harmlessly through the skins of the decoy ships as their construction didn't register enough density and mass to activate the warheads. A few, however, scored direct hits on the tugs or factories within, rendering great damage, if not total destruction, to those unfortunates.

Bursting free of their mylar shells, the remaining tugs and the *Gandalf* sped after the fleeing intruders at max acceleration, with the *Gandalf* gunner managing to cripple one with a lucky shot.

Probably determining that their pursuers were fighter craft, likely due to the general background clutter from debris, the brigands initiated a dangeerous jump and disappeared, abandoning the crippled vessel to be boarded and captured by the *Gandalf* crew.

The defense commander was about the only soul in the bunker not outwardly jubilant when the brigands were reported as fled the

system. When asked why by his exec officer, his response was, "We chased them off, this time. What happens upon their return to wherever they came from? Assuming, as we should, that this was no lone, independent gang of bandits, but part of a larger organization, they'll be reporting to somebody that we had a fleet in orbit when there wasn't one shortly prior. While not all that unusual, considering the level of naval activity through these parts, it'll come as a surprise to the intelligence types and others who plotted this raid."

He paused long enough to issue some quick instructions through his headset mike, then continued.

"Mich, after that report's delivered, somebody's going to want to know more about this 'fleet'. In all likelihood they'll send a scout of some sort, right?" Not waiting for an answer, he went on. "That scout, spy, whatever – it could even be a tramp freighter coming in for legitimate trade, will find our fleet still in orbit but not patrolling the system like it should after an attack. A sure sign that something's not right. And if we dismantle the mock ups, that scout will report us as defenseless, as we were rightly believed to be in the first place. If we sit on our hands and do nothing, next thing you know, we get sacked good and hard."

"Well sir," the exec replied, "What will you suggest we do, once this business with the asteroids is over and Congress starts asking for defense recommendations?"

I'm going to implement this with or without Congress' blessing, using what discretionary funds I have left from this operation, while our industries are still geared up to large scale production. First, we establish unmanned surveillance posts throughout the system. I'd like to add manned ones later on, but automatics will do for now. Hopefully, this will give us advance warning to prepare for unwanted visitors, which we had this time only by luck. If it hadn't been for Kahn . . . there's another angle! Enlist the belters to keep an eye out and report any inbound craft. Maybe make it part of the process for renewing their mining permits?

"At any rate, what I'd like to see within the next six months or so is an interlocking network of surveillance posts, along with both remote controlled and manned firing platforms, orbiting within the two belts and disguised as asteroids. If disguise worked so well for these brigands, I don't see why it won't work for us!" Grinning, the DC sat back and contemplated the vision of enemy warships succumbing to fire from innocent looking asteroids.

"If that ship we captured still has an intact jump drive, I'd like to see us building not only in-system craft, but also jump-capable ships of our own. We've got some good techs that passing fleets haven't 'recruited' away from us. They could use it as a model for building more jump drives. And it that drive is shot, I'm going to propose to Congress that we either undertake to buy outright or 'nationalize' the next freighter that makes a stop here. Now Mich, don't look at me like that! I don't like the idea of stealing someone's vessel any more than you do. But we can't afford to stay bottled up in one system as we're not actually able manufacture everything we need. If we can build some ships, maybe we can restart trade with neighboring systems. They've got to be feeling the pinch too. Our electronics are the best within fifty parsecs in any direction and ought to be worth no small bit in trade." An insistent buzz from the DC's console drew his attention for a moment. The problem attended to, he turned back to his exec.

"Where was I?" the DC asked. "Oh, yes, starships! Weapons are probably going to be our biggest headache. What we can't make ourselves we're going to have to buy. And those we'll be able to find are going to cost dearly, what with the various naval forces dashing about, blowing each other up. Lord, I'd hate to think of what some of those predominantly Ag worlds with little manufacturing capability are going through. Probably paying 'protection' to some self-styled warlord who deserted with his ship. Or worse.

"I've preached to the converted long enough, I see. Think on my ideas, add your own and tell me what you think of all this, alright?" Turning back to his console, he looked at the screens. "Why hasn't anyone issued a recall order to those tugs?!" he bellowed. "Get 'em back here right now!" With that, he became totally absorbed in the displayed information that relayed to him the events occuring above Yavanna.

Responding to the recall, the tugs reversed course at maximum Delta-V and proceeded attempting to divert or destroy the asteroids with the greatest mass. Working in pairs or larger groups, often with hulls in direct contact, they labored mightily against the inertia of the speeding hunks of ore. Those craft not engaged had to dodge both anti-asteroid missiles and other tugs. That no more collisions were occuring than there were was a source of amazement to pilots and ground staffers alike . . .

• • •

. . . That was several hours ago, a memory already blurring in the swirl of activity more recently passed. Her board lit blue, denoting no missiles left at her control, so Toni released her targeting radars to the systems computer for reassignment to another operator. Closing down her board, she pushed back from the console and stood up. Turning to go to her quarters in another part of the complex, she promptly collided with the someone she'd not noticed standing behind her station.

Mumbling an apology, she attempted to push past. As the figure again blocked her way, she looked up and spoke, "*Excuse* me, alright? I'm tired and I'd like to . . . Greg?" Shocked expressions of confusion, joy, and disbelief raced over her features. Touching his face, which was partly covered in dermaplast, she whispered, "Greg, is it really you?"

Drawing her close in his arms, the battered and bruised Greg Westcott smiled and answered, "Yes, it's really me. Been back a week or so from what they say. Didn't anyone tell you?" Before she could reply, he drew her lips close to his, shutting off any possible answer with a deep, lingering kiss.

Suddenly, Toni drew back, her hands clenched into fists and her body beginning to shake. With fire in her eyes, she glared at her fiance. "A *week*!" she cried. Oblivious to the startled stares from most everyone else in the bunker, she went on. "You've been back a week and didn't ever once come and tell me? Dammit, I've been dead inside, thinking you were killed and I'd lost you! Now you come waltzing in here, out of no where, telling me you've been back for a *week*! You inconsiderate, mindless *jerk*! Why?!"

Fighting back shock, in a voice revealing suppressed anger Greg replied. "Why nobody here told you, I don't know. From the time that *Feanor* blew up around me," a flash of pain shown in his eyes, but he continued, "until yesterday, I've been unconcious. Makes it just a little hard to pop in and announce my return! As it is if Steph and Dich Kahn hadn't got me inside the *Mule* and into his autodoc when they did, I'd not be here for you to spit venom at now." Drawing a slow breath, he went on. "From what I was told yesterday, the explosion that holed the bridge managed to crack my helmet enough to create a slow leak. Between that and a few rips in the suit that its self-sealer had trouble closing off, I wound up with one standard-issue concussion, spot vacuum exposure (wait'll you get a look at my legs!), and long-duration, low-atmosphere, partial decompression. So, you see, while the reports of my death were exaggerated, they weren't by much."

The beginning of her apology were cut off by another kiss. That, in turn, was interrupted by a low, "Ahem!" from beside them, followed by a more insistent, "*Ahem*, captain . . . Lt. McManus?"

They turned to look straight into the stern frown of the DC, standing with arms folded not three feet away. Both promptly snapped to attention as he went on.

"While this is all very charming – I have a crisis to manage. And my remaining fire controllers are finding it most difficult to pay attention to their work, what with your smooching, squabbling and making up. McManus, your board is secure, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Now escort this wounded veteran somewhere else. While you're at it, get him to tell you how engineer Izumi jury-rigged a way to couple her air supply to his suit before his completely ran out. Now, carry on. No, strike that. Dismissed."

Oblivious to the applause and cheers from the rest of the bunker personnel, the two of them turned and, arm in arm, walked out the door.

Watching them exit, the DC's executive officer grinned and spoke aside to his boss. "Now, just where do you think she's going to escort that wounded veteran, and do you think he'll survive the tour?"

"That is entirely *their* business," the DC replied with a smile, seating himself at his console again. "Dirty old men like you will just have to daydream." ●

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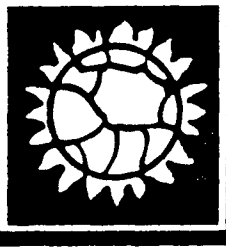
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Fanzine

Newsletter supporting the HISTORY OF THE IMPERIUM WORKING GROUP (HIWG) in developing the future setting of the Imperium. Six issues come with annual membership to HIWG. Authors and artists include Marc Miller, Jeff Swycaffer, Ed Edwards, John Meyers, Gregg Giles, Craig Sheeley, Tom Peters, and Phil Morrissey. Mike Mikesh, editor.

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2 ____ BIRD OF PREY PART II
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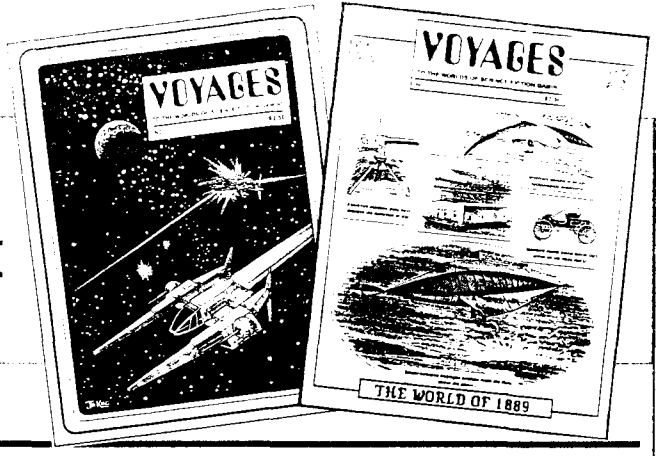
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- ADVENTURING IN THE SHATTERED IMPERIUM, Sources of sub-sector maps and data for *MegaTraveller*
- PROVINCIAL LANGUAGES, Linguistic ties in *Space Master*
- STARBATTLES (MAINLINE), An overview

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- REBEL JUSTICE, An adventure for *Star Wars*
- STAR MAPS, An alternative to the *Star Wars* Astrogation Gazeteer
- KFANGU SPACE FIGHTER A Vargr fighter for *MegaTraveller*
- AMERICANS IN THE ETHER. *Esmarelda* class ether flyer
- CRYOGENIC SURRENDER, An adventure for *MegaTraveller*
- HULL DAMAGE, Specified hull hits in *Traveller*
- THE ANCIENT SCIENCE OF SHRINKING, *Traveller*
- MILITARY DRESS, A look at the uniforms of 1889
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These articles and more in our January issue. Don't miss it!

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